

# **NATURE AND PLACE IN THE POEMS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND WALTER SCOTT**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis originates in the lack of studies comparing poetry by William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Walter Scott (1771–1832). Living in the north of Britain, the two writers not only knew each other’s works, but also enjoyed a friendship spanning three decades. My study places together texts by the two writers which invite comparison and showcase their attitudes toward issues pertinent to their lives and society. A driving principle behind my thesis is the role nature and the poets’ native regions—the Lake District and the Scottish Borders—play in their poetry. With the exception of ‘Yarrow Revisited’ my project covers poems composed up to 1814. The Introduction compares the education and early writing of the two poets, outlines the thematic and theoretical concerns of the thesis, and gives brief accounts of relevant historical contexts. Four chapters explore Wordsworth’s and Scott’s approaches to the self, its representation and examination, and to society, its problems and inevitable evolution. The first considers Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* (1805) and ‘Tintern Abbey,’ and Scott’s *Memoir* and the epistles to *Marmion*. It traces the influence the two writers attribute to nature in their own development as revealed in their autobiographical writings. The second chapter tackles Scott’s *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, reading it as an invitation to society to look on the past for warnings and examples of how to best withstand today’s challenges. The third studies the social themes in Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* and ‘Michael,’ placing a particular emphasis on the portrayal of Grasmere as an ideal community. The fourth and final chapter brings the two men-of-letters together in a reading of Scott’s role, and that of the ballad tradition, in Wordsworth’s Yarrow poems. It is followed by a short Conclusion.

In memory of my father

And for my mother

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I write the last few words of this project my mind jumps back some twenty five years to remember the first few letters I ever wrote in my life. It was my father's hand which held mine and guided it over the page to paint the first shape. His hand held mine throughout my life, offering me the best love and support a father can offer his daughter, and even though he passed away before he could see me accomplish one of my—and his—most valued dreams, I still feel his hand on mine guiding and supporting me from where he is. This thesis is dedicated to his memory which is not alive in my heart alone but in the hearts of everyone lucky enough to have ever met him.

I cannot find adequate words to express what my mother's sacrifice, boundless love, unwavering support, and belief in me has done for me over the years. Having her as my mother has simply made this project possible, and would never have been so without her. I am equally blessed to have two wonderful brothers in my life: Hamdi, whose unlimited love, encouragement, support, faith in me, and continuous presence in my life have seen me through the tough years of my study, and Ghaith, whose warmth, love, sense of humour, constant concern and support on all levels have been the joy of my days. I am equally lost for words to convey my love, gratitude, and appreciation for John's love, support, encouragement, belief in me, and patience, especially at the last stages of my project. Without him I would not have been able to finish—*thank you, for everything, and for being you.*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

I set out in this thesis to study the poetry of two writers of the Romantic period who described their responses to nature in specific places in Britain: William Wordsworth (1770-1850) in the English Lake District and Walter Scott (1771-1832) in the Scottish Borders. The thesis aims at studying the influence of nature and the specific places of the two writers' childhood on their poetry both individually and in comparison to each other. This project investigates the ways in which the two poets approached the concept of nature, as seen through a particular geographical area, in their writing. This exploration aims at eliciting the similarities as well as differences existing in the two poets' response to nature and place. A hypothesis whose validity this thesis tries to explore within the poems chosen as part of the investigation of this project is that nature meant two totally different things to the two men, rather than that their views were similar.

The two writers are being compared because of the many experiences in their lives and background which invite comparison. The main purpose of the thesis is to investigate nature and place in the poems chosen; but on occasion literary issues arising from the enquiry are also briefly discussed, in particular the presence of autobiography and ballads in the work. These topics will be addressed in a selection of poems written by 1814. This date has been chosen because it is the year in which Wordsworth's major poem, *The Excursion*, was published. Scott, who is now best known as a novelist but who first became famous as a poet, published his first novel, *Waverley* in 1814. The only poems to be given extensive coverage outside this time



frame are 'Yarrow Visited' (1815) and 'Yarrow Revisited' (1835), which are included to complete the Yarrow sequence.

Although most chapters in this project refer to works by both writers, there are fewer texts mentioned by Scott than there are by Wordsworth. The reason for this is that Scott turned to Highland subject-matter in *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), and that he dedicated the remainder of his life after 1814 to writing novels, thus marking a divergence in the two writers' literary careers which remained until Scott's death in 1832.

This first chapter paves the way for the later chapters by introducing the main themes they tackle. It also gives an overview of the main influences on the Romantic era, especially in so far as they had a role to play in the writings of Wordsworth and Scott. After two opening sections in which the aims of the thesis and the definitions of the key words, 'Nature' and 'Place' are provided, the chapter proceeds to address some key biographical, geographical and historical contexts. 'Childhood and Education' introduces the lives of the two poets in the form of a comparison and contrast between both men's experiences up to the moment they left university. 'Early writings of the Two Poets' discusses the writers' relationship to a specific part of Britain, and the poems associated with that place, especially in their early writings. A particular focus is given to Wordsworth's poems up to *Lyrical Ballads* and *Home at Grasmere*, and to Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. 'The Friendship between the Two Poets' traces the extent to which the two poets knew each other and each other's works, and shows that their personal relationship was deep and warm, and that both men kept it separate from their opinion of each other as writers. 'Scott, Wordsworth and Ballads' touches on the two poets' interest in a key poetic form. The sections on historical context introduce the French Revolution and the Napoleonic

Wars, and the Industrial Revolution, placing those seminal events as significant background to literary works which were partly shaped by them. 'Geographical Context' tackles the opening up of the Lake District and Scottish Borders in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries, to which Wordsworth and Scott contributed to largely, each in his own region. The penultimate section of the chapter, 'Previous Work Comparing the Writings of the Two Poets' points out the lack of criticism comparing these two writers. Wordsworth's poetry has been studied prolifically by editors, biographers and critics; recent criticism of Scott has tended to concentrate on his novels at the expense of his poems of which there is currently no modern edition. The section outlines such comparative criticism between the two writers as has been found. The Conclusion to this Chapter outlines the scope of the rest of the thesis.

### **The Aim of the Thesis**

The aim of this thesis is to study the poetry of Wordsworth and Scott, two writers of the Romantic period who described their responses to nature in specific places in Britain, the Lake District and the Border, respectively. The study concentrates on the ways in which the response to nature is expressed through the recollections of childhood and the reflections of adulthood in two different geographical areas. The influence of nature and of specific places, experienced in childhood or later, on the poets' writing is studied both individually and in comparison with each other. The literary issues arising from such a study are addressed in a selection of writings up to 1814. That date has been chosen because it is the year in which Wordsworth's major poem, *The Excursion* was published, and Scott, who is now best known as a novelist, but who first became famous as a poet, published his first novel, *Waverley*. The only

poems to be given extensive coverage outside this time frame are 'Yarrow Visited' (1815) and 'Yarrow Revisited' (1835), which are included to complete the Yarrow sequence. Ultimately, this thesis tries to explore, through focusing on poetry written about a specific locale, what nature meant to the two writers, and whether or not they viewed it in two irreconcilably different ways: has it always been to Wordsworth a part of himself and of a whole, a source of truth and understanding, the mother he always went back to in order to find answers? And did Scott always view nature more as a force aligned with tradition that resides outside of himself: the background of both his own life, and his literary writings?

Wordsworth's love of nature has often been believed to value above all the solitary contentment of a soul humbly in communion with the natural world, a state epitomized in very memorable literary figures such as Michael and the Lake District Shepherd. It was in the Lake District that the Wordsworths especially felt the charge of this contentment and connection to a sense of organic spiritual wholeness, out of which a sense of place always arises. It is for this reason that Wordsworth eventually retreated from his forays of curious exploration into the ideas and events arising on the continent back into the maternal bosom of the Lake District.

In contrast, the literary career of Scott, the historian and popular representative of the Border region, is usually seen as demonstrating the fact that the poet viewed nature less as an individual phenomenon and more as a conveyor of collective Border tradition and history. Scott wished to preserve the ennobled tradition of his native region as much as possible. For example, what the poet sees as most admirable about the German ballad tradition is that it is stamped in the same 'manly force of expression' as that of the tradition of British literature, though he also suggests that its tendency towards 'the extravagant and the supernatural,' differs markedly from the

more rational British tradition.<sup>1</sup> In other words, in his writings Wordsworth emphasizes that each individual, as opposed to a society or tradition, is humbly responsible for giving authentic meaning to a certain place. Individuals are used more often in Scott's poetry as preservers and conveyors of Border tradition, such as the Minstrel figure in *The Lay of The Last Minstrel*.

One of the aims of the current project is to investigate the validity of the above views of Scott's and Wordsworth's ideas about nature and the way those views were deployed in poems they wrote about specific geographical areas.

### **Nature and Place**

As the two major thematic concerns of this thesis, which tries to explore issues emerging from Wordsworth's and Scott's treatment of nature in a specific locale, the notions of nature and place – clear as they may seem -- need to be introduced in some detail so as to clarify their more complex meanings and uses as well as explaining the perspectives from which they will be examined in this project.

Readers of Romantic poetry are not surprised to find the word 'nature' either in a poet's works or in comments on them. They will probably assume the word to refer to the rural world experienced out of doors. Poetry describing nature might focus on small details of the countryside, as in poems about flowers or birds, or more wide-ranging views of entire landscapes with features like hills, rivers, lakes, woods and pasture. All of these are in contrast to the works of man. Such a description explains the topic of this thesis to some extent; but does not present the range of meanings in the poets' use of the term 'nature', in particular Wordsworth's.

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<sup>1</sup> J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 7 vols (Edinburgh, 1737-38), Vol. I, pp. 203–04.

The issue is clear from the fact that the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word ‘nature’ as a noun under fifteen headings, not to mention the sub-headings, and that the definition attempted in the paragraph above does not come in until item 11a:

The phenomena of the physical world collectively; *esp.* plants, animals, and other features and products of the earth itself, as opposed to humans and human creations.<sup>2</sup>

The reason why this definition is 11a in the dictionary is because it comes rather late in the historical series of definitions of the word ‘nature’. The definition of ‘nature’ referring to the ‘phenomena of the physical world’, although there were earlier instances of it, became more widely used in the seventeenth century and had arrived at the usage we recognise by the end of the eighteenth. A relevant quotation cited in illustration of definition 11a is dated 1781 and comes from the poet William Cowper. The poem is his ‘Hope’, where lines 740-41 mention ‘Unconscious nature ... / Rocks, groves and streams.’ Listing of features in nature is common in Wordsworth’s and Scott’s poems, and as in Cowper’s work they include in nature not only growing things like animals and plants, but also rocks and water, and in Wordsworth’s case especially clouds and weather.

Although both Wordsworth and Scott usually use the term ‘nature’ to refer to features of the countryside, Wordsworth especially draws on other definitions of the term. One concerns the power of nature. This is defined in *OED*, ‘nature’ (n. 10), as ‘The creative and regulative power which is conceived of as operating in the material world’. Such a power is often personified in the feminine. Earlier centuries referred to ‘Dame Nature’; but by the eighteenth century a writer was more likely to personify Nature by the use of an initial capital. Wordsworth frequently refers to nature’s

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<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* online version, [http:// www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com), nature, n., accessed on 28 August 2012.

power, often personifying Nature in the feminine. An example can be found in Book I of *The Prelude* (1805):

But I believe  
That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame  
A favored Being, from his earliest dawn  
Of infancy doth open out the clouds,  
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him  
With gentlest visitation ....<sup>3</sup>

Another definition of 'nature' from before the Romantic period presents the term as opposed to the divine or spiritual (*OED* 'nature', n. 5.b). 'Nature' referred to matters earthly or human, features of the created world. Wordsworth is remarkable for reversing this, and giving nature a spiritual dimension, with consequent naming of himself as 'A worshipper of Nature' and a 'Youth' as 'Nature's Priest'.<sup>4</sup> He usually does this without displacing the idea of God and heaven.

Dictionary definitions of the word 'nature' are supplemented by the observations of critics. One question which a literary critic is likely to ask about poetry describing the countryside is whether the poet is giving a purely objective description of what he has seen, or whether the description is infused with the poet's own response to the objects observed. Wordsworth is particularly associated with the latter. Ralph Pite gives an example taken from the opening lines of 'Tintern Abbey'. He points out that the poet lists the objects he sees, 'steep and lofty cliffs', 'plots of cottage-ground', 'woods and copses', but that the most significant element in these lines is the repetition of the word 'again'. 'More important than what he sees is the fact that he is seeing these things again....'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *The Prelude*, Book I, lines 362-67, quoted from *William Wordsworth: Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 384.

<sup>4</sup> 'Tintern Abbey', line 153; 'Ode ("There was a time")', lines 71- 72, *William Wordsworth: Major Works*, pp. 135 and 299.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Pite, 'Wordsworth and the Natural World', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 180-95(182).

Scott is less personal in his feelings about nature. Describing walks he took when young in the countryside south of Edinburgh he wrote 'My principal object in these excursions was the pleasure of seeing romantic scenery or what afforded me at least equal pleasure, the places which had been distinguished by remarkable historical events. The delight with which I regarded the former of course had general approbation, but I often found it difficult to procure sympathy with the interest I felt in the latter.'<sup>6</sup>

Another theme in 'nature poetry' is the contrast between a solitary response to nature and nature as a social phenomenon. Ralph Pite favours the latter, despite Wordsworth's tendency to write companions out of his rural experiences: 'In Wordsworth's work "the natural world" is always social, both in itself and in its relation to man.'<sup>7</sup> The social dimension of nature is one of the aspects damaged by the Industrial Revolution, as is plain from *The Excursion* where the Wanderer exclaims:

With You I grieve when on the darker side  
Of this great change I look; and there behold  
Through strong temptation of those gainful Arts,  
Such outrage done to Nature as compels  
The indignant Power to justify herself;  
Yea to avenge her violated rights,  
For England's bane.<sup>8</sup>

Two terms frequently used in eighteenth-century descriptions of nature and rural life still had significance in the early nineteenth century. One is 'pastoral' and the other 'picturesque'.

'Pastoral' is a genre of literature of classical origin, expressive of the countryside and rural life, especially the life of shepherds. It was best known from Virgil's *Eclogues* and was imitated in English from the Renaissance on. The

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<sup>6</sup> Scott's 'Memoirs' (1808) in *Scott on Himself*, ed. by David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), pp. 1-44(37).

<sup>7</sup> Pite, p. 181. An example of apparent solitariness is Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' which does not mention Dorothy who shared the experience with him.

<sup>8</sup> *The Excursion* by William Wordsworth, ed. by Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 263, Book VIII, lines 152-58.

shepherds in classical pastoral poetry lived what appeared to be happy lives in a sunny Mediterranean setting. When this theme was imitated in English poets had to decide whether to copy the classical mode or adapt to the realities of tending sheep in a British landscape. Examples of both are found in the eighteenth century, as well as satire at the expense of the apparent idleness of the shepherds in traditional pastoral.<sup>9</sup>

Both Wordsworth and Scott write about shepherds and both favour a realistic description of the arduous life of a shepherd in Britain while retaining the pleasures of nature usually celebrated in the pastoral tradition. Wordsworth explains in *The Prelude* that

Shepherds were the men who pleased me first.  
Not such as in Arcadian Fastnesses  
Sequestered, handed down among themselves,  
So ancient Poets sing, the golden Age;  
Nor such, a second Race, allied to these,  
As Shakespeare in the Wood of Arden placed....  
(Book VIII, lines 182-87)

In contrast to a Golden Age Wordsworth intends to concentrate on ‘Man suffering among awful Powers, and Forms’ (line 213). Scott, having described the hardship experienced by the shepherd in a winter storm in *Marmion*, continues:

Who envies now the shepherd’s lot,  
His healthy fare, his rural cot,  
His summer couch by greenwood tree,  
His rustic kirk’s loud revelry,  
His native hill-notes, tun’d on high,  
To Marion of the blithesome eye;  
His crook, his scrip, his oaten reed,  
And all Arcadia’s golden creed? <sup>10</sup>

‘The Picturesque’ describes a view of the countryside by likening it to a ‘picture,’ and gained currency through the travel writings of its exponent, William Gilpin (1724-1804). The picturesque suggested that a pleasing view should have a foreground for the use of artist and viewer, boundaries implying the frame of a

<sup>9</sup> Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> *Marmion*, ‘Introduction to Canto Fourth’, *Scott: Poetical Works*, ed. by J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 125 (text unlineated).



picture, often supplied by trees, and within the picture itself a view which retreats into the distance from foreground, through middle-ground to a distant point which meets the sky. It is Scott rather than Wordsworth whose descriptions of nature are influenced by the picturesque. Many descriptions of natural scenes in his verse romances and in his later novels, are pictorial and inspired the work of landscape painters and book illustrators throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> An example relevant to this thesis is the description of Melrose Abbey in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.<sup>12</sup> Scott was interested in the technical details of the picturesque and regretted his own lack success in learning to sketch:

I do not by any means infer that I was dead to the feeling of picturesque scenery; on the contrary few delighted more in its general effect. But I was unable with the painter to dissect the various parts of the scene, to comprehend how the one bore upon the other or to estimate the effect which various features of the view had in producing its leading and general effect.<sup>13</sup>

Wordsworth's most celebrated descriptions of nature are visionary, for instance his own experience on Mount Snowdon and experiences of his fictitious characters in *The Excursion*.<sup>14</sup> In these descriptions the emphasis is on the magnificent features of the sky and sea rather than a landscape scene typical of the picturesque.

There is for today's reader a different context in which to consider the Romantic poets and nature, namely ecology. Ecology, as the term is now used, involves concern for the wellbeing of the natural world in all its aspects, and a critical assessment of the behaviour of human beings as members of it. Wordsworth's kinship with such thinking has been explored by Jonathan Bate in his *Romantic Ecology*:

*Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991). Bate points out that

Wordsworth was admired as a 'poet of nature' until the second half of the twentieth

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<sup>11</sup> See Richard J. Hill, *Picturing Scotland through the Waverley Novels* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, 'Canto Second', I, *Scott: Poetical Works*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Scott's 'Memoirs' (1808) in *Scott on Himself*, pp. 1-44(37).

<sup>14</sup> *The Prelude*, Book, XIII, lines 29-65; *The Excursion*, Book II, lines 857-912; Book IX, lines 580-608.

century when critical emphases shifted. First was the importance given to the Imagination in Wordsworth's poetry in the work of Geoffrey Hartman among others.<sup>15</sup> This gave place in the 1980s to an historical approach which stressed the impact of the French Revolution on the poet, and gave Marxist readings of social topics in his works.<sup>16</sup> In these contexts the study of Wordsworth and nature might appear an old-fashioned approach, until our current environmental consciousness brought back the importance of nature and our relationship to it.

Scott's more pictorial view of nature has not served him well in the modern world. Nineteenth-century readers valued his descriptions of nature and places they were unlikely to have seen. Increasing travel, as well as photography and film, have contributed to a response among today's readers that Scott gives too much space to natural description.

A 'place' in the context of this thesis is a 'particular part or region of space, a physical locality, a locale, a spot, a location. Also: a region or part of the earth's surface.'<sup>17</sup> It is clear enough that the English Lake District and the Scottish Borders are regions of the earth's surface. It is a more complex matter to consider other concepts of place relevant to the argument of this thesis. A place, however substantial from our perspective, is small compared with the immensity of space of which it is part, and it is usually contrasted with time, a specific instance of which is small in comparison with eternity. Many places are identified by name, and place-names are frequent in the poems of both Wordsworth and Scott. The two poets, however, proceed differently. Wordsworth is not always specific, as in the famous title 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey.' He can allude to a place without giving its

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<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964).

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.4-9.

<sup>17</sup> *OED* online, place, n.1, 5a, accessed on 28 August 2012.

name: in *The Prelude* he refers to making ‘a choice / Of one sweet Vale whither my steps should turn’ (I, lines 81-82) without naming it as Grasmere. In the account of his school-days he does not name Hawkshead, although there is a hint in the reference to ‘Esthwaite’s neighbouring Lake’ (I, line 566), and Furness Abbey is brought in as ‘that large Abbey which within the Vale / Of Nightshade, to St. Mary’s honour built / Stands yet’ (II, lines 110-12).

There are other examples of significant places which are unnamed, for instance the location of the Solitary’s house in *The Excursion*. Most of these places have been identified by Wordsworth scholars, sometimes aided by Wordsworth himself – assistance not available to the earliest readers. Scott, on the other hand, gives generous place-names, probably because he writes as an historian and the exact locating of places supports his narrative. Bate likens Scott to John Clare in ‘cherishing the music of place-names’ and points out the vigour with which his poetry lists places most of which would be new to the reader.<sup>18</sup> A particular example is Scott’s use of place-names in describing the journey of a man on horseback. These lines come from William of Deloraine’s urgent ride to Melrose Abbey in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*:

And soon the Teviot side he won.  
Eastward the wooded path he rode,—  
Green hazels o’er his basnet nod;  
He pass’d the Peel of Goldiland,  
And cross’d old Borthwick’s roaring strand.<sup>19</sup>

His route is described in terms of place-names, history, and nature, with a regular rhythm reflecting the journey.

Rivers are important in Scott’s presentation of the Scottish Borders. In comparison Wordsworth mentions few rivers, although references to the Derwent stand out. Wordsworth, of course, mentions lakes, which are not so common in the

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<sup>18</sup> Bate, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, ‘Canto First’, xxv, *Scott: Poetical Works*, p. 6.

Scottish Border, although Scott regards St Mary's Lake in the Yarrow Valley as important. It is hard to call a river a place, unless a specific part of it is mentioned — the part of the Derwent where the young Wordsworth played, or the spot on the Aill water where the moss-trooper crossed it.<sup>20</sup> Wordsworth's Yarrow poems raise this issue, as the Yarrow Water runs through a valley, and specific sites are mentioned along its banks and at its mouth. Place therefore is not easy to define where there is the possibility of a place-within-a-place. The point, however, is that the poets' works often direct the reader's attention to a specific spot or location. A reason for linking nature and place in this thesis is that it focuses its topic on the poets' use of nature in poems about specific areas. This is necessary since both poets wrote poems set in other parts of their country. Another aspect which the poets share is a tendency to link place with time: both are sensitive to aspects of nature which are seasonal, and to buildings once powerful and now in ruin.

### **Wordsworth and Scott: Childhood and Education**

The lives of Wordsworth and Scott bear a lot of similarities up to the moment they entered university. After that, their paths split, and each young man had a different vision as to how his life should be run. I try to shed light on the similarities in the poets' early lives before moving on to the differences which emerged between them later on in life. This section also attempts to show how similar circumstances can produce very different people, demonstrating that having similar pasts does not necessarily mean that the future will also be the same.

The similarities in the lives of Wordsworth and Scott begin to unfold at birth: the poets were born only one year apart— Wordsworth was born in 1770 in

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<sup>20</sup> *The Prelude*, Book I, lines 272-304; *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, 'Canto First', xxix.

Cockermouth in the Lake District; Scott, in 1771 in Edinburgh. Both were the sons of professional men too, and grew up in houses which were neither rich nor poor.

Wordsworth was the second child of John and Ann Wordsworth, who had four other children: Richard, Dorothy, John, and Christopher. Wordsworth's father was the law-agent to Sir James Lowther, a well-connected wealthy man who was believed to be the most powerful in Westmorland.<sup>21</sup> Scott was the ninth child of Walter and Anne Scott. His father worked as a Writer to the Signet, 'a superior order of solicitors peculiar to Scotland', and his mother was daughter of Dr John Rutherford, a renowned professor of medicine in Edinburgh University.<sup>22</sup> She married Scott's father in 1758, and the couple had many children, of whom only five survived: Robert, Walter, Anne, Thomas, and Daniel.<sup>23</sup>

The second main similarity between the two poets was that they both suffered tragedies and difficulties in boyhood. When Scott was eighteen months old he had a fever which proved later to have been a symptom of 'infantile paralysis,' or poliomyelitis, which was not yet recognized then.<sup>24</sup> The disease left the child's right leg powerless, and after all forms of treatment were exhausted, Dr Rutherford suggested sending him to live with his paternal grandparents whose farm, Sandyknowe, near Kelso in the Scottish Borders promised the fresh air and outdoor space needed to improve the child's situation, and which the family's life in Edinburgh could not provide. Scott was sent to Sandyknowe in 1773, and – apart from some periods of interruption – mainly lived there until 1778. Wordsworth's childhood was even more tragic than Scott's, although calamity was to strike when he was older. In 1778, Wordsworth's mother contracted pneumonia while she was

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 13-14.

<sup>22</sup> Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown*, 2 vols (London: Hamish Hamilton), Vol. I, pp. 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, Vol. I, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, Vol. I, p. 7.

staying with friends and died around 8 March.<sup>25</sup> This devastating blow shook the family and tore it apart never to live together under one roof again. A few months after her mother's death, William's sister Dorothy left Cockermouth to live with her mother's relations in Halifax. Wordsworth himself entered Hawkshead grammar school the following year with his brother Richard, and spent the next eight years in this small village which he would come to regard as home and cherish the fondest memories of.<sup>26</sup> He boarded with a local lady called Ann Tyson, who, childless herself, seems to have provided the boys with love and care, and gave them not just a boarding place, but a real home. Despite this temporary peaceful episode in Wordsworth's life, fate had yet another blow in store for him. On New Year's Eve 1783 Wordsworth's father died after having lost his way back home late at night. He was forced to spend the night in the open in extremely cold weather. William, Richard, and Christopher went back home for the Christmas holidays to find their father dying, and they were still there when he passed away.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the tough childhood both poets had, and the separation from their parents they had to endure for different reasons, there were influential figures in their lives who had a lifelong effect on their personalities and partially made up for the absence of parents. These two people were Scott's aunt Janet Scott and Wordsworth's landlady Ann Tyson. Scott's condition improved as a result of the clean, fresh air in his grandparents' farm, the physical exercise, and traditional methods of treatment. This improvement, however, was more emotional than physical: Scott was to limp for the rest of his life, but it was in Sandyknowe that he had 'the first consciousness of existence,' and heard about Border folklore, which would later constitute an

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<sup>25</sup> Gill, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

inexhaustible source of inspiration for his writing.<sup>28</sup> ‘The local information, which I conceive had some share in forming my future taste and pursuits,’ Scott points out, ‘I derived from the old songs and tales which then formed the amusement of a retired country family. My grandmother, in whose youth the old Border depredations were matter of recent tradition, used to tell me many a tale of Watt of Harden, Wight Willie of Aikwood, Jamie Tellfer of the fair Dodhead, and other heroes—merry-men all of the persuasion and calling of Robin Hood and Little John.’<sup>29</sup> On the long winter days Scott’s aunt Janet read to him from ‘Two or three old books which lay in the window-seat [...] with admirable patience, until [he] could repeat long passages by heart.’<sup>30</sup>

The person whom Wordsworth regarded with little less ‘than filial love’, and who nourished the poet’s young imagination and furnished it with stories for his poetry later was Ann Tyson. Dorothy notes how Tyson would tell William and her other charges stories about her life at Bonaw in Argyllshire which were ‘half as long as an ancient romance.’<sup>31</sup> Tyson told the boys folklore stories from Hawkshead too, stories ‘about a Whig and a Jacobite who sought to hide from the ruin of their fortunes in the obscurity of Hawkshead, about two men called Weston thought to be highwaymen, about a shepherd whose son first brought joy but subsequently misery to his old age.’<sup>32</sup>

The paths of the two poets’ lives ran parallel in terms of education too. Both Wordsworth and Scott had good schooling which led to them entering renowned universities. Wordsworth joined the grammar school at Hawkshead in 1779. The school was an excellent one, and he was given a good grounding in English grammar

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<sup>28</sup> J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 7 vols (Edinburgh, 1737-38), Vol. I, p.16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Gill, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Gill, p. 26.

and literature, the Classics, mathematics and science or Natural Philosophy, which was vital for the university degree which he was to read for later in Cambridge. Pupils were encouraged to use the good school library and write poetry.<sup>33</sup> The school's connections with Cambridge University, and the preparation Wordsworth received in mathematics, meant that in 1787 he could go up to Cambridge, a place he did not find congenial nor strove to distinguish himself at. Scott also studied at a good school. In 1779 he was sent to the High School of Edinburgh, where he was a pupil until 1783. There he learnt Latin, and under the rector, Dr Alexander Adam, nurtured a love for literature. 'They read Caesar, Livy, Sallust, Virgil, Horace, and Terence; they were encouraged to translate the poets into English verse.'<sup>34</sup> Scott had to leave school before the end of the session in 1783 because of ill health. He joined his aunt Janet in Kelso where she now lived, and, when his health improved, attended the Kelso grammar school, where he continued his study of Latin and taught it to junior classes. It was here that Scott met James Ballantyne who later became his printer, business partner, and literary adviser. Scott only spent half a year at Kelso, his health proving a determining factor in his life yet again. Scott was seldom allowed to settle down in one place for a satisfactory length of time or to continue a course of education till its end. This is partly why Scott's own reading was more important than formal instruction. He read extensively, borrowing works of history from the library in the High School. At Kelso he started on 'Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Mackenzie, and he even read Tasso [...] But by far the most important discovery was Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, which Scott read with almost physical

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-29.

<sup>34</sup> David Hewitt, 'Scott, Sir Walter (1771-1832), poet and novelist' in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004-2011), p. 3; accessed at <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> and hereafter cited as *ODNB*.



pleasure in the garden in Kelso.<sup>35</sup> Scott's career at the University of Edinburgh was divided in two by illness. He first entered University in 1783 at the age of twelve, and remained there until he was forced to drop out in 1786. He studied Latin and Greek, at which he did badly; in his second year Scott took a class in logic and metaphysics, in which he did well and was required to read an essay before the principal, William Robertson the historian, but his illness prevented him from doing so. Having left the University, Scott became an apprentice to his father. The tedium of office work caused him to aim at becoming not a solicitor like his father, but an advocate – in England, a barrister. That required returning to the University, which he did in 1789-92, studying moral philosophy, civil law and Scots law, which enabled him to be admitted as an advocate in 1792.<sup>36</sup>

Another similarity between the two writers is that they both lived in parts of the country which were just being recognized as beautiful and sublime natural areas. The two writers not only knew how beautiful their native regions were, they also contributed to making these areas famous, and later came to be closely associated with them, Wordsworth with the Lake District, and Scott with the Borders, as I will show in a following section. Scott learned to look at the beauties of nature and appreciate them in Kelso. Renowned for its charm, Kelso had outstanding natural features to offer the child, including the meeting of two rivers, the Tweed and the Teviot, and the ruins of Roxburgh Castle in the background.

It is curious that the first major publications of the two poets were both concerned with ballads. Scott's was a ballad collection, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–03), which was modeled after Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), and which featured Border ballads, many of which Scott

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<sup>35</sup> ODNB (Scott), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> ODNB (Scott), pp. 5-6.

collected himself. Wordsworth's first major publication was a joint project with Coleridge: a collection of what they called *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800).

The similarities between the two writers end here, and their paths separate as they leave university. Wordsworth turned against the idea of pursuing a profession for which his Cambridge degree would have qualified him and decided to devote his life to poetry. He never did any job until very much later in life, and mainly depended for livelihood on the profits from his books and his friends' generosity. Scott preferred to have a fixed income, so he held professional posts in law throughout the years in which he was writing first poetry and then novels. Despite the fact that Scott remarks, 'propose to me to do one thing and it is inconceivable the desire I have to do something else',<sup>37</sup> he did what was required of him in his father's office, because, as he says, '[he] loved his father, and because [he] liked to earn a little money to spend on the theatre or books from the circulating library.'<sup>38</sup> Wordsworth did the opposite of what his patrons wanted him to do. His Cambridge degree would have guaranteed him a post in the law or the church, but he refused this out of hand, and preferred to spend his time travelling and reading to widen his horizons and learn more about the world.

Wordsworth was more of a traveler than Scott. While still a student at Cambridge, he and his friend Robert Jones went on a walking tour through revolutionary France to the Alps in the summer vacation of 1790. Wordsworth's first visit to France and northern Italy focused particularly on the magnificent scenery through which they passed. His second visit, this time to Paris and Blois in late 1791 and 1792, was predominantly concerned with politics.<sup>39</sup> Scott's travels were more

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<sup>37</sup> *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by W. E. K. Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> *ODNB* (Scott), p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Gill, 'Wordsworth, William (1770-1850), poet', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, pp. 3-5; accessed online at <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> and hereafter cited as *ODNB*.

limited, being largely confined to the Scottish Borders until the 1790s when he made several journeys to the Scottish Highlands.

The two poets were different politically too. Whereas Wordsworth overtly supported the ideals of the French Revolution; Scott's stance on it was less clear, especially as his writing is more concerned with Britain during the Napoleonic Wars than with the principles advocated by the Revolution, its impact on society, or the course it took. Mostly historical in nature, Scott's writing could also be read as an attempt to avoid the present and go back to a glorious past, trying to resurrect its best features in a society which has long left it behind. All that can be said about Scott's politics in more detail is a matter of conjecture. He, for example, remains silent about his own views of the French Revolution in all his works. The omission is striking, for it is impossible to believe that such an event was not a red-hot topic for discussion among his friends, whose arguments 'sometimes plunged deeply into politics and metaphysics.'<sup>40</sup> What was discussed is not recorded, and none of the surviving letters of the period 1789-92 raises a political issue. However, he led in a debate in the Speculative Society on 1 March 1791 about whether Britain's putting Charles I to death in 1649 was justifiable, which was carried in the affirmative. 'He and a few friends called themselves "the mountain", the name of one of the more extreme parties in revolutionary France. And given that until 1792 it was the Tories under Pitt who were the reforming party in the House of Commons, it is possible that the young Walter Scott had a sympathetic view of the revolution, like his character Jonathan Oldbuck in *The Antiquary*.'<sup>41</sup>

In due course Scott's political views became firmly constitutional: after the terror began in September 1792, Louis XVI's beheading in January 1793, and the

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<sup>40</sup> Scott, *Memoirs in Scott on Himself: A Selection of the Autobiographical Writings of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> *ODNB* (Scott), p. 7.

French declaration of war on Britain on 1 February 1793, he lost any sympathy he might have had with the Revolution. In April 1794 he got involved in a fight with some anti-royalist Irish students, and was bound over to keep the peace. In June he was one of the thousand gentlemen who volunteered their services as constables to prevent popular disturbances, and he wrote with approval of the Edinburgh volunteer regiment formed to oppose a French invasion. He served with great enthusiasm in the Royal Edinburgh light dragoons from its formation in 1797, and acted as its secretary and quartermaster.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike Scott, Wordsworth was not silent about the Revolution. Influenced by the ideas of William Godwin (1756-1836), who in his *Enquiry into Political Justice* (1793) argued against the need for governmental institutions as long as people acted rationally, Wordsworth became a supporter of the French Revolution. He was personally able to witness a part of the events which later came to be referred to as the Revolution when he visited France in 1791. After the outbreak of war between France and England in 1793 Wordsworth was compelled to remain in England although he might have liked to be present there and witness the developments taking place first hand. He still supported the cause of the Revolution then, as his poem 'Guilt and Sorrow' reveals through its strong views on social justice. He also wrote a *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* (1793), a pamphlet that gave support to the French Revolution. It was a response to the Bishop's pamphlet in which he had protested at the execution of Louis XVI, and fervently praised monarchy and the British constitution.<sup>43</sup>

Wordsworth's view of the Revolution changed after the Reign of Terror (September 1793-July 1794), and the expansionist tendency France showed afterwards. Like Scott, he enlisted in a regiment in the Lake District to defend his country in case the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10 .

<sup>43</sup> *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane W. Smyser, Vol. I (Tirril, Cumbria: Humanities-Ebooks, 2008), pp. 48-69.

French attacked it. This change of attitude came at a high price, as Wordsworth became a target for the second generation of Romantics and later poets. Famously, Browning angrily denounced his hitherto-much-admired forerunner's change of heart over the radical cause:

Just for a handful of silver he left us,  
 Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat,  
 [...]  
 We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,  
 Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,  
 Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,  
 Made him our pattern to live and to die!<sup>44</sup>

It appears that Wordsworth's and Scott's love for and allegiance to the localities they grew up in, and their willingness to defend these places from foreign attack, would later supersede any merely ideological discursive musings on the moral principles of the French revolution, an event which would, nevertheless, provide some of the ideas and vocabulary with which they evaluated and idealised particular places and regions with a sense of history in their writings. The geography of these places, rather than mere ideological allegiances, proved to inscribe for them the true 'pattern to live and die' that Browning refers to. It can perhaps be said that love of places over historical ideologies eventually held sway over their souls, a love which would find a central place in their artistic creation representing the power of these places over the human soul throughout personal and cultural history.

The final difference between the two poets to be discussed here concerns the reception of their poems. Scott's poems were more successful on publication than

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<sup>44</sup> 'The Lost Leader' by Robert Browning (1812-89), lines 1-2, 9-12 (*Browning: Poetical Works 1833-1864*, ed. by Ian Jack (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 429-30)..

Wordsworth's, and made him much richer for the greater part of the two authors' careers. Scott was to be financially stable for the most part of his life until financial hardship hit him so severely in 1826 that he decided to write himself out of debt instead of announcing his bankruptcy. Wordsworth's case was almost the opposite. For the most part of his early life as a poet Wordsworth had no financial security. Evidence abounds regarding the lack of means he had to struggle with, especially since his writings were never big financial successes. It was only in 1813 that Wordsworth gained some stability in the form of a job which supplied a regular income.<sup>45</sup> What was similar in the poets' cases in this regard was that both were subject to critical reviews, especially by the *Edinburgh Review* critic Francis Jeffrey (1773-1850), whose reviews were too harsh sometimes. For example, when Wordsworth published *Poems, in Two Volumes* in 1807, Jeffrey declared that 'If the printing of such trash as this be not felt as an insult on the public taste, we are afraid it cannot be insulted.' Jeffrey's review of *The Excursion* opens with yet another such remark: 'this will never do', he simply starts his article.<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey was less harsh on Scott, but he did point out Scott's careless composition that resulted in glaring flaws in the meter and grammar of the poems. In criticizing *Marmion* (1808), for instance, Jeffrey points out that 'there was too much in the poem that was "flat and tedious" where Scott appeared merely to be vaunting his historical knowledge. He objected to the anachronistic vogue for chivalry that Scott had fostered and, as an advocate of peace with France, bridled at the bellicose sentiments of the introductory epistles.'<sup>47</sup>

Scott was the more famous poet in his lifetime. His writings were so immensely popular and influential that when his health began to deteriorate the news

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<sup>45</sup> He was appointed Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland in 1813. (Gill, p. 296.)

<sup>46</sup> *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Robert Woof (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 194, 382.

<sup>47</sup> *The Walter Scott Digital Archive*, <<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk>> accessed on 4 May 2011.

was being daily reported throughout the UK. When he lay dying in his bed in Abbotsford in 1832, it was as if royalty was dying. Wordsworth enjoyed relative fame at the end of his life, but it was not until after his death in 1850 that the tables turned. In the decades that followed, Wordsworth's fame rose as Scott's started to wane. Wordsworth is now the more popular of the two with a formidable amount of scholarship produced every year. Scott is much less studied, especially as far as his poetry is concerned.

The financial security that Scott experienced, together with his immense popularity, perhaps influenced him to venture as a literary spokesman of the region of his upbringing into idealised and nostalgic historical musings on the region of which he boasted a great knowledge. In contrast, Wordsworth remained for the greater part of his writing career less an affluent spokesman for the region of his upbringing and more a humble laboring sojourner within it, dependent upon its inspiration for his daily subsistence as a writer.

### **Early Writings of the Two Poets**

Wordsworth's and Scott's first major publications are ballad collections, as I have already mentioned. Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* is a collection of strictly Border ballads, whereas Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* which he co-authored with Coleridge contained relatively little Lake District material in its 1798 edition. More Lake District poems were added in the 1800 edition, of which 'Michael: a Pastoral Poem' is the most celebrated. 'Michael' is entirely devoted to the condition of an old Grasmere shepherd whose childless, hardworking, and monotonous existence is completely turned around when his wife gives birth to a son, Luke. Michael's plight, brought about when his land is threatened and he is forced to find a solution to save it,

was shared by many poor northern families whose way of life was also threatened by the new advances in industry resulting from the rapid changes in manufacturing and trade now called the Industrial Revolution. Before the publication of the poets' earliest major poetry collections, Wordsworth and Scott had composed – and in some cases translated – other, less-known works, of which few referred to the poets' native regions, as the following overview shows.

Scott's first poem to have survived is described as 'Preserved by his Mother' and dated 1782.<sup>48</sup> It is in twelve five-stressed lines, rhyming in couplets, and describes an eruption of Mount Etna, the volcano in Sicily, in imitation of a passage in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book III, 570. Two more short poems, described as 'Preserved by his Schoolmaster' are dated 1783, and entitled by the editor 'On a Thunderstorm' and 'On the Setting Sun'.<sup>49</sup>

Scott's first published works show two of the important literary fashions of the 1790s: the Gothic and German romantic writing. German literature was very little known in Britain before the Romantic period. It was introduced to an Edinburgh audience in a lecture by Henry Mackenzie, delivered at the Royal Society of Edinburgh on 21 April 1788. Scott's response to the event was:

The literary persons of Edinburgh were then first made aware of the existence of works of genius in a language cognate with English, and possessed of the same manly force of expression [...] those who were from their youth accustomed to admire Shakespeare and Milton, became acquainted for the first time with a race of poets, who had the same lofty ambition to spurn the flaming boundaries of the universes, and investigate the realms of Chaos and Old Night [...] Their fictitious narratives, their ballad poetry, and other branches of their literature, which are

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<sup>48</sup> Scott: *Poetical Works*, ed. by J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 694.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 694-95.



particularly apt to bear the stamp of the extravagant and the supernatural, began also to occupy the attention of the British literati.<sup>50</sup>

Scott joined the German class which was started in Edinburgh in 1792, and learned enough to read and start translating German literature. His first publications were translations of German ballads: '*The Chase*' and '*William and Helen*': *Two Ballads, from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger* was published in Edinburgh in 1796.<sup>51</sup> The next project he worked on was a translation of Goethe's play *Goetz of Berlichingen*, which he published in 1799. The Border ballad imitation 'The Eve of Saint John' which Scott composed himself and published in 1800 was perhaps his first serious attempt at writing about his native region. The ballad was, Scott reminisces, 'approved of,' and 'procured [him] many marks of attention and kindness,' thus initiating him as a poet who 'hastened to make the round of all [his] acquaintances, showing [his] precious wares, and requesting criticism—a boon which no author asks in vain'.<sup>52</sup> The ballad begins by giving a very detailed prose description of Smailholm Tower, where the events take place:

Smaylho'me, or Smallholm Tower, the scene of the following Ballad, is situated on the northern boundary of Roxburghshire, among a cluster of wild rocks, called Sandiknow-Crags, the property of Hugh Scott, Esq. of Harden. [...] The tower is a high square building, surrounded by an outer wall, now ruinous [...] The apartments, as usual, in a Border Keep, or fortress, are placed one above another, and communicate by a narrow stair; on the roof are two bartizans, or platforms, for defence or pleasure [...] Among the crags by which [the tower] is surrounded, one

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<sup>50</sup> Lockhart, Vol. I, pp. 203–04.

<sup>51</sup> For the publication history of Scott's earliest poetry see *Sir Walter Scott: A Bibliographical History 1796-1832*, ed. by William B. Todd and Ann Bowden (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1998), pp. 9-18.

<sup>52</sup> Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (London: George G. Harrap, 1931), p. 558.

more eminent is called the Watchfold, and is said to have been the station of a beacon in the times of war with England.<sup>53</sup>

This introduction exhibits important aspects of some of the characteristic features of Scott's later writings about the Borders. It showcases his knowledge of his subject matter – Smailholm Tower and its surrounding area, which are close to his grandparents' cottage at Sandyknowe – in addition to its ownership, function, and, more importantly, its history which he neatly sums up by referring to 'Watchfold', the location of a beacon used at time of war between the Scots and the English. By ending this introduction with a reference to the 'ruined Chapel' outside the tower, Scott reminds his readers of the destruction which befell Scottish monasteries and abbeys during the protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Scott's sense of history and 'Border-ness' is further extended to the poem and its notes, where the poet documents some names of Border families, the area's history, geography and tradition. Thus, for example, we know that the 'Baron of Smaylho'me' belongs to the Buccleuch family although he 'went not with the bold Buccleuch, /His banner broad to rear,' and that he was in a state of enmity with the English although 'He went not 'gainst the English yew, /To lift the Scottish spear' (5-8). The Baron returned to the tower later, but not from 'Ancram Moor' where -- Scott explains in a footnote -- in 1555 AD, the battle of Ancram Moor' took place, in which Archibald Douglas Earl of Angus and Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch routed a superior English army under Lord Ralph Ivers and Sir Brian Latoun.<sup>54</sup> In its Gothic style, its treatment of love, death, war, deceit, and the contrast between religious and social traditions, the ballad simultaneously harks back to Border ballads, whose plots contain a lot of those

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<sup>53</sup> Scott: *Poetical Works*, p. 687.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 687-88.

elements, and anticipates Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which expands and develops most of the thematic aspects of 'The Eve of Saint John'.

In 1801 Scott contributed three ballad imitations to Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Tales of Wonder*, including, in the second printing, 'The Eve of Saint John'.<sup>55</sup> One year later, he published his famous ballad collection *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, which appeared in two volumes in 1802, and in three the following year. The *Minstrelsy* is divided into three sections: historical ballads, romantic ballads, and ballad imitations. Scott's favourite out of these three categories was the historical ballad section, which he provided with full annotation. This preference is hardly surprising when one reads the dedication of the ballad collection, which also sheds light on the reason it has been compiled,

In the Notes and occasional Dissertations it has been my object to throw together, perhaps without sufficient attention to method, a variety of remarks regarding popular superstitions and legendary history which, if not now collected, must soon have been totally forgotten. By such efforts, feeble as they are, I may contribute somewhat to the history of my native country, the peculiar features of whose manners and character are daily melting and dissolving into those of her sister and ally. And trivial as may appear such an offering to the manes of a kingdom once proud and independent, I hang it upon her altar with a mixture of feelings which I shall not attempt to describe.<sup>56</sup>

The passion with which these lines are written is unmistakable. Wordsworth's first major publications have perhaps been composed with a similar passion, but are, though having much to do with the love the poet had for his native region, hardly as patriotic as Scott's dedication. In a typical Wordsworthian manner, we are told that

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<sup>55</sup> Todd and Bowden, p. 18. The ballad subsequently appeared in Vol. III of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1803), in the section entitled 'Imitations of the Ancient Ballad'.

<sup>56</sup> *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (London: Harrap, 1931), p. 70.

Wordsworth's first awareness of his calling to become a poet was inspired by nature and took place in a rural area associated with nature,

I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. It was in the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, [...] and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency.

I could not have been at that time above 14 years of age.<sup>57</sup>

This took place while Wordsworth was still a schoolboy at Hawkshead grammar school. His first verses ever to survive were written in 1785, when he was fifteen during his school's bicentenary celebrations. All the bright pupils were called upon to produce lines celebrating the occasion. Wordsworth composed a hundred lines of heroic couplets, 'Lines on the Bicentenary of Hawkshead School', which were, 'much admired, far more than they deserve, for they were but a tame imitation of Pope's versification and a little in his style,' as the poet states.<sup>58</sup>

Around ten other poetic attempts were made while Wordsworth was still studying at Hawkshead. 'Anacreon Imitated' was composed on 7 August 1786; 'Beauty and Moonlight, An Ode Fragment' was an expression of love towards Mary Hutchinson whom he had previously met when they were both attending Ann Birkett's school in Penrith as infant pupils,<sup>59</sup> 'A Ballad' is dated 'March 23 & 24<sup>th</sup> 1787', and 'Dirge Sung by a Minstrel' commemorated the death of one of his

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Gill, p. 30.

<sup>58</sup> William Wordsworth, *Early Poems and Fragments 1785-1797*, ed. by Carol Landon and Jared Curtis (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 356-61; Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 56.

<sup>59</sup> *Early Poems and Fragments*, pp. 362-68, 378-82. William and Dorothy were sent to their maternal grandparents' house at Penrith for long periods of time. There is evidence that he was staying in Penrith when he was only 3 years old, i.e. before the death of his mother.

schoolmates and 'was then re-cast to suit the death of a girl.'<sup>60</sup> There are descriptions of scenes from the Lake District in some of those poems, despite the fact that loco-descriptive poetry was not very fashionable then. 'Anacreon,' for instance, imitates Anacreon's Ode on his mistress and introduces a scene from Grasmere near the end. The passage is not entirely dedicated to natural description – the poet is rather using natural imagery to convey the beauty of the girl – but the fact remains that for the boy Wordsworth to think of such metaphors derived from nature in a romantic scene is noteworthy,

Loosely chaste o'er all below  
 Let the snowy [mantle] flow  
 As silver'd by the morning beam  
 The white mist curls on Grasmere's stream  
 Which like a veil of flowing light  
 Hides half the landscape from the sight  
 Here I see the wandering rill  
 The white flocks sleeping on the hill.

(35-42)<sup>61</sup>

Wordsworth's most important poem at this early stage was 'The Vale of Esthwaite' written at the end of his schooldays. Esthwaite Water is half a mile south-east of Hawkshead. 'The Vale of Esthwaite' was of around 600 lines, and was never published as a complete poem in Wordsworth's lifetime. The only part that was published was the conclusion, which appeared in his *Poems* of 1815 under the title: 'Extract from the Conclusion of a Poem, Composed upon Leaving School'. The remaining parts contained ideas and images which Wordsworth used in other

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<sup>60</sup> *Early Poems and Fragments*, pp. 385-90, 563-81; Moorman, p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366..

poems.<sup>62</sup> Large parts of the poem were dedicated by Wordsworth to his 'own adventures, and the scenery of the country in which [he] was brought up.'<sup>63</sup> The poem contains some fine lines of natural description, such as the sunset scene,

While in the west the robe of day  
Fades slowly fades from gold to gray  
This oak its boughs and foliage twines  
Mark'd to the vie in stronger lines  
While every dark'ning leaf between  
The sky distinct and clear is seen.

(95-100)<sup>64</sup>

Wordsworth's first poetic attempt to appear in print was published in the *European Magazine* in March 1787. The sonnet entitled, 'On seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams weep at a Tale of Distress'<sup>65</sup> marked the beginning of the young boy's lifelong journey of poetic exploration and composition.

'An Evening Walk' was written by the time Wordsworth left Cambridge in 1791. It later appeared in a small quarto volume which carried the title 'An Evening Walk. An Epistle; in Verse. Addressed to a Young Lady, From the Lakes of the North of England' in January 1793.<sup>66</sup> The poem is a nostalgic tribute to the exceptional beauty of the Lakes region, to the innocent 'departed pleasures' Wordsworth once had as a child growing amongst its hills, lakes and meadows, and, above all, to Dorothy, his 'dearest friend' from whom he was separated in 1778, not to see each other again for nine years (1-12).<sup>67</sup> The poem has a unique significance: it is the first one

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<sup>62</sup> *Early Poems and Fragments: 1785-97*, pp. 407-14.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Vale of Esthwaite', lines 95-100, *Early Poems and Fragments*, pp. 428, 430.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 394, 396..

<sup>66</sup> William Wordsworth, *An Evening Walk*, ed. by James Averill (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

Wordsworth wrote about his native region while he was away from it. This is a tendency which was to continue, culminating in *The Prelude* -- parts of which were written in Germany where the poet also wrote the 'Lucy' poems and a piece which was later published in the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* under the title 'Nutting'.<sup>68</sup> Wordsworth used the vivid memories he had of the Lake District in writing poetry which celebrated the area and his love for it. 'There is not an image' he says of 'An Evening Walk,' 'which I have not observed,' marking the factual nature of the poem's descriptions.<sup>69</sup>

Wordsworth's life was destined to change forever in 1795 when, sometime between August and September, he met Coleridge in Bristol. The friendship developed so rapidly that the two men became inseparable after June 1797.<sup>70</sup> Later that year William and Dorothy moved into Alfoxden House, a mansion four miles away from Nether Stowey, where Coleridge and his family lived in Somerset. If Wordsworth said later on in his life that Coleridge was 'one of the two beings to whom [his] intellect is most indebted',<sup>71</sup> it all started in Alfoxden, and if the year the Wordsworths spent in Somerset, 1797-98, is known as the *Annus Mirabilis*, it is because of this blossoming new friendship. The Wordsworths and Coleridge spent as much time together as possible discussing literature, philosophy, religion, politics as well as planning some poems and writing others, thus heralding the start of the most creative period in Wordsworth's poetic life. During this year Wordsworth made plans for his life's greatest ambition, *The Recluse*, a philosophical poem on Nature, Man, and Society. The poem was originally suggested by Coleridge, and was never finished or published although Wordsworth wrote a good deal towards it throughout his life.

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<sup>68</sup> Moorman, p. 417.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000), p. 67.

<sup>70</sup> Gill, p. 111.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Gill, p. 111.

During this year also Wordsworth wrote other poems including 'Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree', 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and 'The Last of the Flock' which were his contribution to the controversy carried on in Parliament and in books and magazines on how best to cope with the growing mass of the absolutely impoverished. He probably worked on 'The Ruined Cottage' during that year too.<sup>72</sup> More importantly, he dedicated the most time and effort to his joint production with Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, which was published in September 1798.

The most striking aspect of the *Lyrical Ballads* for readers in 1798 was that it was written in a new way. The style of the poems was very simple, and the characters were ordinary people whom one often comes across in everyday life. The book was a 'conscious attempt to write in a new way,' that places emphasis on the emotion aroused by the poem and not the poem itself.<sup>73</sup> This was a substantial shift from Augustan poetry, which is known for observing social and not individual conventions, for being derived from the head, not the heart, and for regarding poetic form as more important than content.<sup>74</sup>

The poem which concluded the volume, and which came to be the most acclaimed amongst Wordsworth's contributions to it was 'Tintern Abbey' which, while sharing with the other poems a simple style and commonplace subject, differs from them by being autobiographical. It is a Lake District poem despite the fact that it is not set in the Lake District.<sup>75</sup> Here Wordsworth remembers his childhood days when 'nature [...] to [him] was all in all,' and natural objects 'an appetite; a feeling

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<sup>72</sup> F. B. Pinion, *A Wordsworth Chronology*, (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 27.

<sup>73</sup> *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (New York: Methuen, 1971), p. xxvii.

<sup>74</sup> Anthony Burgess, *English Literature* (London: Longman, 1981), p. 141. The eighteenth century is sometimes called England's Augustan Age. The reference is to that period of Roman history when the Emperor Augustus ruled, and when the Roman Empire enjoyed great power, prosperity, and stability. Eighteenth-century England had all these things too.

<sup>75</sup> The Wye Valley is on the borders between England and Wales. It covers parts of the counties of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Monmouthshire.



and a love'.<sup>76</sup> And although the poet states that the joys he once felt in being close to nature are now gone, he admits that a new self emerged within him as he gained more experience and knowledge of life; a self which can see 'into the life of things' to find in nature 'the nurse/The guide, the guardian of [Wordsworth's] heart, and soul/Of all [his] moral being' (110-12). It is a self which now looks 'on nature, not as in the hour/Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes/The still, sad music of humanity' (89-92). He has now come to realize that it is through nature and the unity the soul can feel while contemplating it that he can connect to humanity, share its suffering, and accept its destiny as part of a grand scheme of things.<sup>77</sup>

In September 1798 the Wordsworths and Coleridge set out for Germany where they spent a winter which, although stimulating to Coleridge, brought little satisfaction to William and Dorothy. They returned to England in May 1799. One of the most pressing tasks the Wordsworths faced on their return was finding a home. Although divided between their love for the North and their desire to be next to Coleridge, the Wordsworths decided on renting the cottage called Town End in Grasmere, hoping at the same time to be able to convince Coleridge and his family to move next to them, which they eventually did. Wordsworth wrote to Coleridge trying to lure him into the Lakes: 'in the North of England amongst the mountains whither we wish to decoy you, you might enjoy [skaiting] with every possible advantage.'<sup>78</sup> On 27 October 1799 the two friends had gone on a walking tour in the Lake District,

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<sup>76</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 131-35, lines 73, 76, 81. All later quotations from Wordsworth's poetry will come from this edition unless otherwise stated.

<sup>77</sup> Wordsworth's life experience and political views witnessed a huge change between 1795 and 1798. His support for all that the French Revolution stood for turned into shock as he witnessed its immersion into violence in the Reign of Terror

<sup>78</sup> William and Dorothy Wordsworth to Coleridge, 14 or 21 December 1798, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Vol. I, *The Early Years 1787-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 238.

and Coleridge was overwhelmed by the beauty he witnessed there.<sup>79</sup> Those techniques seem to have worked, and, after the Wordsworths moved to Grasmere in December 1799, Coleridge had moved with his family to Keswick, half a day's walk away from Wordsworth, by the end of July 1800. This move heralded one of the happiest and most settled periods of Wordsworth's life where he could finally have a fixed home with his sister and best friend by his side, and this sense of contentment is echoed in the poems composed at that time.

'Home at Grasmere', which was later conceived of as the introductory book of *The Recluse*, was one such poem.<sup>80</sup> Wordsworth shows that he was not only blessed by having 'perpetual streams, /Warm woods, and sunny hills, and fresh green fields/And mountains not less green, and flocks and herds' (145-47) but by a unique sense which only that place has:

'tis the sense  
Of majesty and beauty and repose,  
A blended holiness of earth and sky,  
Something that makes this individual Spot,  
[...]  
A Whole without dependence or defect,  
Made for itself and happy in itself,  
Perfect Contentment, Unity entire.

(161-64, 167-70)

This sense of unity and wholeness in a rural community such as Grasmere contrasts with the alienation Wordsworth felt in big cities and amongst people who have been estranged from their rural roots, thus losing touch with nature. People who commune

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<sup>79</sup> For a detailed account of the tour and its effect on Wordsworth see Gill, pp. 166-68.

<sup>80</sup> *William Wordsworth: The Major Poems*, pp. 174-99.

with natural forms and objects, Wordsworth asserts in the poem, are not lonely or alienated, even if they spend all their days alone, for,

solitude is not  
Where these things are: he truly is alone,  
He of the multitude, whose eyes are doomed  
To hold a vacant commerce day by day  
With that which he can neither know nor love—  
Dead things, to him thrice dead—or worse than this,  
With swarms of life, and worse than all, of men,  
His fellow men, that are to him no more  
Than to the Forest Hermit are the leaves  
That hang aloft in myriads.

(807-16)

Life in the Lake District was also reflected in the new edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* issued on 25 January 1801. Concluding the book was a new poem, 'Michael,' which was completely dedicated to the North of Britain, its traditions, way of life, and the threats it was facing as a result of industrialization. The decision to add poems about his birth place to the volume indicates Wordsworth's determination to make it all the more a Lake District book, and further establishes him as the poet of the Lakes. The poem is a strong statement on parental love and devotion, on the love of land, and a humble, honest way of life led for generations before it came under attack. It was only after Luke, Michael and Isabel's son, was sent to the strange, frightening world of the city that he got corrupted and forgot the promise he made to his father in front of the sheepfold, as I will show in Chapter 4.

Wordsworth's joy at being back in the Lake District, and his celebration of the place and what it stood for, could be attributed to a few factors, chief among which is

the sense of peace he must have felt at being given what he had always lacked: a true family and a home he chose himself where he could pursue his life dream. This joy could also be traced down to his writings during and after his stay in Germany. In one of the poems he wrote at Goslar Wordsworth says,

I travelled among unknown Men,  
In Lands beyond the Sea;  
Nor, England! did I know till then  
What love I bore to thee.

(1-4)<sup>81</sup>

He has come to appreciate his country as he tells Cottle in a letter he wrote within a month of his return to England: 'we are right glad to find ourselves in England, for we have learnt to know its value.'<sup>82</sup> This sense of love is perhaps also behind such poems as 'Home at Grasmere' and 'Michael'.

### **The Friendship between the Two Poets**

'Dear Sir Walter! I love that Man', exclaims Wordsworth very simply and wholeheartedly in 1830, two years before the death of his friend.<sup>83</sup> Scott equally loved and respected Wordsworth, stating, 'I do not know a man more to be venerated for uprightness of heart and loftiness of genius [than Wordsworth]'.<sup>84</sup> This mutual respect and affection marked the two men's long friendship which lasted nearly three decades, during which they occasionally visited each other, and, when visits were not possible, nourished their friendship with letters.

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<sup>81</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Works*, p. 237.,

<sup>82</sup> William Wordsworth to Joseph Cottle c. 20 May 1799, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. I, p. 259.

<sup>83</sup> William Wordsworth to Samuel Rogers, 30 July 1830, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. V, *The Later Years, Part II, 1829-1834* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 310.

<sup>84</sup> Walter Scott to Allan Cunningham, after 20 December 1820, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols (London: Constable, 1932-34), Vol. VI, pp. 319-20.

The two poets met for the first time on 17 September 1803 when Wordsworth and Dorothy called on Scott and his wife at their cottage in Lasswade, south-east of Edinburgh. The Wordsworths were on their first Scottish tour, and it is likely that they were introduced to the Scotts by John Stoddart (1773-1856), a mutual friend.<sup>85</sup> Both poets seem to have recognized each other as writers and scholars. Scott probably knew *Lyrical Ballads*, to which he frequently alluded in his later writing.<sup>86</sup> Wordsworth may have known Scott's translations of German ballads, and is likely to have seen his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* at Lasswade. Wordsworth did not own a copy of the *Minstrelsy* until 1805 due to various delays.<sup>87</sup>

The Wordsworths spent the next few days in the Scottish Borders. When they were at Clovenfords, Dorothy records, 'being so near to the Yarrow, we could not but think of the possibility of going thither, but came to the conclusion of reserving the pleasure for some future time, in consequence of which, after our return, Wm. wrote the poem.'<sup>88</sup> The poem referred to is 'Yarrow Unvisited,' which was partly written to please Scott, who loved the Yarrow.<sup>89</sup> The poem and Scott's influence on it will be discussed in further detail in the final chapter. Scott showed the Wordsworths Melrose Abbey on 19 September,<sup>90</sup> and met them in Jedburgh the following day when, Dorothy noted, 'Mr. Scott sate with us an hour or two, and repeated a part of the Lay of the Last Minstrel'.<sup>91</sup> This was the long poem Scott was preoccupied with at the time, and which appeared in 1805. Wordsworth's long poem, *The Prelude*, which was

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<sup>85</sup> Johnson, Vol. I, p. 179

<sup>86</sup> The copy of *Lyrical Ballads* in Scott's library is the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of 1805 (*Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford*, ed. by J. G. Cochrane (Edinburgh, 1838), p. 246).

<sup>87</sup> *Wordsworth's Reading: 1800-1815*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 184.

<sup>88</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland (A. D. 1803)*, in *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by E. De Selincourt, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1959), Vol. I, p. 391.

<sup>89</sup> The Yarrow Water flows east from St Mary's Loch to meet the Ettrick Water near Selkirk.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 394-95.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 399. Duncan Wu suggests that the Wordsworths may have 'already heard of the poem and possibly seen parts of it in MS' while they were at Lasswade (*Wordsworth's Reading: 1800-1815*, p. 183).

never to be published during his lifetime, was not shared with Scott, and would never have been known to him. The Wordsworths set out home to Grasmere on 23 September.

Wordsworth wrote to Scott later thanking him for his hospitality, establishing a correspondence between the two men which continued until Scott's death in 1832. Wordsworth's letter expresses the poet's delight in visiting the Teviot and Esk valleys on his way home, while retaining his preference for Westmorland:

The country was in its full glory, the verdure of the valleys, in which we are so much superior to you in Scotland, was but little tarnished by the season, and the trees were putting on their most beautiful looks. My Sister was quite enchanted, and we often said to each other what a pity Mr Scott is not with us!<sup>92</sup>

The letter goes on to give news of Coleridge and Southey, to comment on contemporary literary reviewing, and to invite the Scotts to visit the Wordsworths in Grasmere. Wordsworth ends the letter 'your sincere Friend, for such I will call myself, though slow to use a word of such solemn meaning to any one'.

That the two men should feel close after such brief an encounter is not surprising, especially given the similarities in their background and circumstances which I have outlined in the first section. There are, as Gill points out, other reasons for this closeness too, such as the two poets' shared passion for their homeland, knowledge of its people, landscape and traditions, and their willingness to write about them. They were both loved by the local people and wanted in their ballad collections to challenge prevailing taste. That is why Wordsworth tried to strengthen his ties with

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<sup>92</sup> Wordsworth to Scott, 16 October 1803, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. I, p. 412.

Scott; he knew there were a lot of things he could learn from such a man, especially about Scotland and its literature and history, which he was interested in.<sup>93</sup>

When *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* appeared in January 1805 Scott sent Wordsworth a copy. Wordsworth wrote to thank Scott for his 'Border Romance' before it had arrived, sending in return a copy of 'Yarrow Unvisited'.<sup>94</sup> Before they could respond to *The Lay* the Wordsworths were devastated by the death of their brother John in the sinking of the *Earl of Abergavenny*. Wordsworth's letter of acknowledgement to Scott starts bravely:

High as our expectations were, I have the pleasure to say that the Poem has surpassed them much. We think you have completely attained your object; the Book is throughout interesting, and entertaining, and the picture of manners as lively as possible.

Grief made it impossible for him to continue: 'I could have wished to have written to you at some length on the subject of your Poem; but I am unable: you will excuse me'.<sup>95</sup>

In the autumn of 1805 Scott and his wife visited Grasmere. Determined to show his gratitude for Scott's hospitality two years earlier, Wordsworth met the Scotts in Keswick upon their arrival in the Lake District, and took them on a guided tour of the region. They visited Greta Hall, the Lodore Falls, Watendlath and the Bowder Stone, Patterdale, and climbed Helvellyn. Independently, both poets later wrote poems in memory of a traveller who had died falling from the mountain and whose body had been guarded by his faithful dog.<sup>96</sup> Lockhart's account of the event gives a

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<sup>93</sup> Gill, pp. 216-18.

<sup>94</sup> Wordsworth to Scott, 16 January 1805, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. I, pp. 529-32.

<sup>95</sup> Wordsworth to Scott, 7 March 1805, *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 553.

<sup>96</sup> Wordsworth's poem, entitled 'Fidelity', is in his *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 70-74; Scott's,

glimpse of his father-in-law's impression about the visit: 'About this time Mr and Mrs Scott made a short excursion to the Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland, and visited some of their finest scenery, in company with Mr Wordsworth. I have found no written narrative of this little tour, but I have often heard Scott speak with enthusiastic delight of the reception he met with in the humble cottage which his brother poet then inhabited on the banks of Grasmere.'<sup>97</sup> Some indication of the conversation which took place in Grasmere may be gained from Scott's letter to the poet Anna Seward the following year in which he described being in the company of Wordsworth and Southey:

They are certainly men of very extraordinary powers, Wordsworth in particular is such a character as only exists in romance virtuous, simple, and unaffectedly restricting every want & wish to the bounds of a very narrow income in order to enjoy the literary and poetical leisure which his happiness consists in— Were it not for the unfortunate idea of forming a New School of Poetry these men are calculated to give it a new impulse, but I think they sometimes lose their energy in trying to find not a better but a different path from what has been travelled by their predecessors—<sup>98</sup>

Despite the growing friendship between the two men Wordsworth did not much admire *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. He recognized that Scott had achieved what he had set out to do as described in the note at the beginning of the poem: 'the Poem is intended to illustrate the customs and manners which anciently prevailed on the Borders of England and Scotland.'<sup>99</sup> The problem for Wordsworth was that a poem should have a larger ambition than that, and that Scott had failed in managing

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entitled 'Hellvellyn', is in *Scott: Poetical Works*, ed. by J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 703-04.

<sup>97</sup> Lockhart, Vol. II, pp. 70-71.

<sup>98</sup> Scott to Anna Seward, 10 April 1806, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. I, p. 287.

<sup>99</sup> *Scott: Poetical Works*, p. [1].



his 'subject'. As poets the two men were entirely different: Scott wrote hastily and fluently and, although he read proofs carefully, he was not a reviser. Wordsworth wrote more slowly and revised and reworked his poetry, often over many years. Scott, to his own surprise, became immensely successful: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, although reviewers pointed out weaknesses,<sup>100</sup> was popular with the public, a popularity which continued with later poems and, from 1814, with the series that came to be known as the Waverley Novels. This popularity made him rich.

Wordsworth never had such popularity in his lifetime, and in his early years was often short of money. It must have been galling for Wordsworth to see the success of a fellow writer who did not share the lofty view of the poet which he and his circle cultivated. Scott wrote consciously in the minstrel tradition, in which success with his public was a necessary aim, and his debt to the oral tradition explains the borrowings and alterations in his poems which observers from the print tradition might easily regard as imitation and carelessness. Wordsworth was displeased when Scott misquoted lines from his 'Yarrow Unvisited' in *Marmion* (1808).<sup>101</sup> Overall, it seems that neither poet completely agreed on what the other was trying to achieve in his writings. In a telling comment, Scott puzzles over the fact that Wordsworth will never give in to public taste 'Why [Wordsworth] will sometimes choose to crawl upon all-fours, when God has given him so noble a countenance to lift to heaven, I am [...] little able to account for'.<sup>102</sup> Wordsworth's opinion of Scott's poetry is hardly less harsh, 'as a poet [Scott] cannot live for he has never, in verse, written anything addressed to the immortal part of man.' As a novelist, however, Wordsworth believed

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<sup>100</sup> For instance in the unsigned review in the *Literary Journal* of March 1805, reprinted in *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John O. Hayden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 25-34.

<sup>101</sup> Wordsworth to Scott, 4 August 1808, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. II, *The Middle Years, Part I, 1812-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 264.

<sup>102</sup> Walter Scott to Allan Cunningham, after 20 December 1820, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. VI, p. 320.

that ‘Scott had touched a higher vein, because there he had really dealt with feelings and passions’.<sup>103</sup> At least Scott turned down the office of Poet Laureate when it was offered to him in 1813 – it went to Robert Southey. It was not until 1843 that Wordsworth himself became holder of that post.

Wordsworth and Scott remained friends over the years, maintaining a cordial correspondence despite not seeing each other as often as they wished. Wordsworth witnessed both Scott’s success and his downfall. In 1820 Scott was awarded a baronetcy. In 1826 he and his partners in the printing and publishing businesses which had produced his literary works suffered a financial crash, which resulted in Scott’s dedicating his last years, in increasing ill-health, to writing to clear the debts. It is hard to know whether Wordsworth shared his sister’s shock at what Scott’s crash revealed. Dorothy wrote to a friend two months after the crash, ‘How *could* it have happened that he should have so entered into *trade* as to be involved in this Way — he a Baronet! A literary Man! A Lawyer?’<sup>104</sup> None of these circumstances, however, disrupted their friendship. They met for the last time on 19-22 September 1831 when Wordsworth and his daughter, Dora, visited Scott immediately prior to Scott’s setting out for Italy to avoid another Scottish winter. The visit came upon Scott’s invitation to Wordsworth to see him before it was too late. Wordsworth’s health was not good either, but was nonetheless better than his dying friend. Wordsworth was suffering from severe eye problems, and despite this he travelled to Scott’s home at Abbotsford once his eye condition allowed it. This last meeting is recorded in Wordsworth’s ‘Yarrow Revisited,’ which will be discussed in the last chapter, and is also referred to

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<sup>103</sup> H. A. L. Rice, ‘Wordsworth in Easedale’  
<http://ariel.synergiesprairies.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/445/437> [accessed 29 July 2011]

<sup>104</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth to Mary Laing, 29 March 1826, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. III [IV], *The Later Years, Part I, 1821-1828* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 432. .

in Wordsworth's elegy on contemporary poets, 'Extempore Effusion Upon the Death of James Hogg'.<sup>105</sup>

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### **Scott, Wordsworth and Ballads**

A ballad, in the literary sense shared by Romantic poets and modern readers, is a traditional song which tells a story. It is traditional in the sense that the earliest ballads were handed down through oral transmission in communities often little more than semi-literate. The origin and authorship of such ballads is not usually known, and they often have an impersonal tone which frustrates any attempt to detect individuality in the work. Ballads of that sort tend to alter in the course of transmission, so that we might now have different versions of what appears to be the same story. Ballad singing was until fairly recently a feature of poor, rural communities in many parts of Britain.<sup>106</sup>

Ballad transmission, however, was not entirely the province of the poor. Late medieval minstrels, often associated with courts and big houses, might sing popular ballads and preserve them in manuscript. With the spread of printing in the sixteenth century, printed ballad sheets became available giving the text, and sometimes also the music, of a ballad. This was an urban development which encouraged the production of topical and satirical versions known as 'street ballads'. Printed ballad texts were cheap and regarded as of low literary status, despite their popularity. That situation changed in the eighteenth century with the development of an antiquarian

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<sup>105</sup> *William Wordsworth: The Major Poems*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 370-71.

<sup>106</sup> Traditional ballads are collected in F. J. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. 1884-98 (New York, 1965).

interest in ballads and their origins, and the publication of ballad texts in volumes produced by learned collectors and editors. The most celebrated example of such publications is Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* published in three volumes in 1765 and often reprinted. As collections of ballad texts became fashionable eighteenth-century poets created a new genre, that of the ballad imitation. A ballad imitation will tell a ballad-style story, often in the four-line stanza common in traditional ballads, but will be the work of a known poet rather than the product of oral transmission. As time went on ballad imitations grew further from the traditional ballad style than was the case with the early imitations. The 1790s sees a new addition to the sorts of ballad available with the translation into English of German ballad imitations, in particular the popular supernatural ballads of Gottfried Augustus Bürger (1747-94).<sup>107</sup>

Both Scott and Wordsworth read Percy's *Reliques* in youth. Scott first read it while staying in Kelso, and Wordsworth at Hawkshead Grammar School.<sup>108</sup> In other respects, however, the two young men had very different experiences of ballads. Scott heard ballads being sung and recited in the Scottish Borders; Wordsworth does not appear to have had that experience in the Lake District – he does not recall hearing singers in his accounts of his childhood. It is not that there was no oral tradition in the Lake District. Wordsworth benefited from Ann Tyson's telling of stories, some of which inspired his own poems; but we have no record of a ballad-singer in that role. Wordsworth's best known reference to such a singer is in the *Prelude*, and it refers to

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<sup>107</sup> Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads' (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), especially chapter IX, 'The Ballad Revival and the 1790s' and chapter X, 'The Ballad Experiment of 1798'. For a brief introduction to ballads in the Romantic period see Claire Lamont, '"Will no one tell me what she sings?" – Wordsworth, the Ballad, and Romantic Story-Telling' in *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n. s. 153 (Spring, 2011), 24-36(26-27).

<sup>108</sup> Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading, 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 110-111.

a street singer in London.<sup>109</sup> A likely explanation is that the Lake District, for all its distinct qualities, was not a landscape or a society likely to foster a ballad tradition – it has often been pointed out that the areas of Britain in which ballads flourished were those which contained a border.<sup>110</sup>

As we have seen above, Scott's first publications are based on ballads: translations of German ballads, ballad imitations, and the creation of the concept of 'Border Ballads' through his edition of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. His first major poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* is not itself a ballad – being better described as a verse romance – but through the use of a minstrel singer contains examples of ballad singing in the Borders. The case of Wordsworth is very different: he did not translate or edit ballads, but draws on aspects of the ballad tradition in many of his poems. The most obvious instance is in the naming of the collection of poems published by Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*. Ballads are a narrative genre, exactly the sort of poetry which might satisfy what in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth refers to as readers' 'craving for extraordinary incident'. The term 'lyrical' modifies the narrative emphasis the reader might expect from a ballad. The first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* opens with what has turned out to be the most famous ballad imitation in English literature, Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner'. Thereafter in the two volumes of *Lyrical Ballads* there are only a few poems which one might consider calling a ballad – but there are several which draw ballad features into the narrative. The best known is 'The Thorn' which draws on both a German ballad and probably a version of the traditional ballad known as Child 120, 'The Cruel Mother'. A group of poems about a man on horseback, 'The

<sup>109</sup> *The Prelude*, Book VII, lines 195-96, 209.

<sup>110</sup> The first person recorded as making this observation seems to have been Thomas Percy, in the third edition (1775) of his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, I, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii. The passage is quoted in the Introduction to *Romanticism's Debatable Lands*, ed. by Claire Lamont and Michael Rossington (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 2-3, 9, note 8.

Idiot Boy’, ‘Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman’ and ‘Heart-Leap Well’, as well as showing elements of ballad imitation, all make use of the German ballad known in English as ‘The Wild Huntsman’.<sup>111</sup> There is no reference in any of these poems to the Lake District. Indeed it appears that Wordsworth’s knowledge of ballads came from wide reading, and that it supplied him with a tradition which he could draw on but seldom copied. Robert Woof, acknowledging Ann Tyson’s contribution to Wordsworth’s poems, comments:

The domestic tale is the kind of story Wordsworth makes us of in his poetry; not the impersonal ballad narrative, but the tale, often pathetic in its content, which was anchored to actuality by personal knowledge.<sup>112</sup>

Ballads play only a minor role in this thesis. It is necessary to introduce them in the account of Scott and Wordsworth’s early works; otherwise only limited use can be made of them in a thesis with the theme of ‘Nature and Place’. Scott’s ballad imitations draw on the traditions of the Scottish Border; but Wordsworth’s seldom draw on the Lake District. There is also the issue of ‘Nature’ in relation to ballads. Ballads are usually tightly narrative and do not go in for detailed description of their setting. Where a reference to a natural feature occurs it usually plays a symbolic role within the ballad – we might think of the thorn, the green-wood, or the significant presence of a flower or a bird. This is different from the sort of natural description, personal to poet or speaker, which Scott and Wordsworth give in other sorts of poetry. A consequence is that ballads are mentioned in only two of the chapters of this thesis, Chapter Three on Scott’s *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and Chapter Five on Wordsworth’s Yarrow Poems, which draw on ballads from the Scottish Border. The Yarrow poems are not themselves ballads, but they draw on both a traditional ballad and a ballad imitation set in the Yarrow valley.

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<sup>111</sup> See Lamont, “‘Will no one tell me what she sings?’—Wordsworth, the Ballad, and Romantic Story-Telling”, pp. 30-36.

<sup>112</sup> T. W. Thompson, *Wordsworth’s Hawkshead*, ed. by Robert Woof (London, 1970), p. xv.

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## **Geographical Context: The Discovery of the Scottish Borders and the Lake District**

The discovery of these two northern areas, which were remote from the inhabitants of southern Britain and the country's major cities, took place gradually over the eighteenth century. Travelers, and those later regarded as tourists, started to visit these areas, and their experiences and responses are recorded in paintings and drawings, in journals and letters, and gradually in poetry. The writer most associated with the discovery of the Scottish Borders and the creation of their imaginary identity in people's minds is Scott. The discovery of the Lake District is similarly most associated with Wordsworth.

In her article discussing the opening up of the Scottish Borders as a result of the immense popularity of Scott's writings, Claire Lamont states,

This literary enhancement of geographical identity itself has a history: it is a feature of romanticism, and cannot be traced much before the late eighteenth century. [...] It flourished in a society of readers willing to be enchanted by poetry and novels, and to respond to the variety of human experience generated by unfamiliar landscapes. Such readers might even be moved to visit the area, and a growth in the number of visitors is usually a consequence of a region's heightened identity.<sup>113</sup>

The texts most responsible for bringing the Borders to the attention of the reading public on an unprecedented scale are Scott's works *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*

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<sup>113</sup> Claire Lamont, 'The Discovery of the Borders: Sir Walter Scott', in *The Borders Book*, ed. by Donald Omand (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 1995), pp. 147–159 (p. 147).

(1802–1803), *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), and *Marmion* (1808). Most of Scott's writings after 1808 are set outside the Borders, although there are significant Border scenes in some of his novels, for instance *Guy Mannering* (1815). The rising popularity of other Border writers such as James Hogg, and the increase in paintings of the region, meant that new factors came to contribute to the popularity of the area.<sup>114</sup>

Before Scott brought the Borders to the attention of a large reading public, other, less successful attempts at introducing the area and its heritage, took place. The first romantic 'discovery' of Scotland was not in the Borders but in the Highlands, spurred by the publication of the *Works of Ossian* (1765) by James Macpherson (1736–1796). There were eighteenth-century paintings of Highland scenes: paintings of the Scottish Borders, for instance the valleys of the rivers Teviot and Tweed, tend to be inspired by Scott's writing, and are therefore of the nineteenth century.<sup>115</sup> Where the Scottish Borders were particularly mentioned in the eighteenth century was in songs and ballads. These were commonly sung, collected and imitated. The most famous song collection was Allan Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1723-26), first published in Edinburgh and frequently reprinted. The collecting of folk-songs gained further impetus from the input of the poet Robert Burns towards the end of the century. Song collections frequently contain pastoral songs set in the Borders. An example can be found in a collection to which Burns contributed, James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1803). The song is untitled and starts, 'When summer comes, the swains on Tweed / Sing their successful loves' and ends with this stanza:

Ye powers that haunt the woods and plain[s]

Where Tweed with Tiviot flows,

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>115</sup> James Holloway and Lindsay Errington, *The Discovery of Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1978), pp. 87-102. 'Provincial and Border Antiquities: The Borders and Tweed'.



Convey me to the best of swains,  
And my lov'd Cowdenknows.<sup>116</sup>

Bishop Thomas Percy's immensely popular *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) brought the ballads of both sides of the Anglo-Scottish Border to a larger audience, and was Scott's inspiration for writing the first collection of ballads to be dedicated to a single geographical area.<sup>117</sup>

Eighteenth-century visitors to Scotland concentrated either on Edinburgh, at its height as a cultural centre owing to intellectual advances known as the Scottish Enlightenment, or the Scottish Highlands rendered fascinating to visitors through the publication of *Ossian*. For travellers from the south it would be easy to miss the Scottish Borders, since the major roads from England to Scotland were either on the east, through Berwick, or the west, through Carlisle, taking the visitor to Edinburgh or Glasgow without penetrating the Borders. Scots, however, were in the eighteenth century beginning to find the Borders worth visiting. When Burns, a native of Ayrshire, first got the opportunity to explore his native country, the year after the success of his first volume of *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), he visited the Borders and admired the ruins of Melrose Abbey.<sup>118</sup> The most famous non-Scottish traveller to the Borders was the poet Thomas Gray (1716-71), who visited Scotland briefly in 1765. He visited Melrose and recorded the 'noble ruins of the Abbey-Church [...] exquisitely adorn'd'.<sup>119</sup> Gray also visited the Lake District in 1769, and in his journal made the first detailed and appreciative description of Grasmere, 'this little unsuspected paradise' where 'not a single red tile, no flaring

<sup>116</sup> *The Scots Musical Museum 1787-1803*, ed. by Donald A. Low, 2 vols (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991), Vol. I, p. 71.

<sup>117</sup> Lamont, 'The Discovery of the Borders', p. 152.

<sup>118</sup> Robert Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), pp. 267-68.

<sup>119</sup> Duncan Tovey, *Gray and his Friends* (London, 1890), p. 263.

Gentleman's house, or garden-walls, break in upon the repose.' In this unassumingly beautiful place, Gray goes on to say, 'all is peace, rusticity, & happy poverty in its neatest most becoming attire.'<sup>120</sup>

The first poem to contain a description of Lake District scenery is the *Descriptive Poem, Addressed to Two Ladies, At their Return from Viewing the Mines near Whitehaven* (1755) by John Dalton (1726-1811). The poem of 336 lines starts with a description of the mines and other industrial developments near Whitehaven, a port on the Cumbrian coast which was growing in importance in the eighteenth century under the patronage of the Earls of Lonsdale. It is a reminder that mining for coal or lead, and quarrying, were taking place near the unspoiled glories of nature for which the district was becoming celebrated. After their visit to the mines the two ladies, members of the Lowther family, at line 183 'return' to rural life. After some compliments to Lowther Castle, Dalton goes on to describe the Vale of Keswick, specifically Derwentwater and the Lodore Falls and Skiddaw.

Horrors like these at first alarm,  
But soon with savage grandeur charm  
And raise to noblest thought the mind.  
Thus by thy fall, Lodore, reclin'd,  
The craggy cliff, impendent wood,  
Whose shadows mix o'er half the flood,  
[...]  
Channels by rocky torrents torn,  
Rocks to the lake in thunder born,  
Or such as o'er our heads appear  
Suspended in their mid career,

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<sup>120</sup> *Thomas Gray's Journal of his Visit to the Lake District in October 1769*, ed. by William Roberts (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), p. 88.

To start again at His command,  
 Who rules fire, water, air, and land,  
 I view with wonder and delight,  
 A pleasing, tho' an awful sight.

(ll. 255-60, 270-77)<sup>121</sup>

The poet then looks beyond the lake, and the town of Keswick, to Skiddaw:

Supreme of mountains, Skiddow, hail!  
 To whom all Britain sinks a vale!  
 Lo, his imperial brow I see  
 From foul usurping vapours free!  
 'Twere glorious now his side to climb,  
 Boldly to scale his top sublime.

(ll. 288-93)

Terms like 'horrors', 'savage grandeur', 'his top sublime' are typical of eighteenth-century language used to describe rocky and mountainous landscapes. Typical too is the linking of the power of nature to the power of the Creator, and the mind's 'noblest thought' which such scenery inspires. Another feature is the paradox involved in citing 'horrors' which the viewer enjoys as 'a pleasing, tho' an awful sight'. It was only two years later, in 1757, that Edmund Burke (1729-97) subjected such responses to theoretical analysis in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.

It is noticeable that Dalton wishes to climb to the top of Skiddaw.

Wordsworth's poetic descriptions of Lake District mountains do not often describe climbing to the top—although Wordsworth and Scott climbed Helvellyn together in

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<sup>121</sup> John Dalton, *A Descriptive Poem, addressed to Two Ladies, At their Return from Viewing The Mines near Whitehaven* (London, 1755), ll. 255-260. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. Newcastle University. 3 May 2011.

1805, and in the *Prelude* the ascent of Snowdon is celebrated. Mountain-climbing with a view to getting to the top, without the reason that a shepherd might have, was gradually becoming an accepted activity in the eighteenth century. Despite that, Wordsworth's mountain descriptions are more often devoted to the presence of the mountains in relation to sky and cloud or mist effects at the time.

Grevel Lindop remarks that 'the scenery of the vale of Keswick was among the first areas of intensely "picturesque" scenery to be discovered in Britain.'<sup>122</sup> The 'picturesque' in nature was a mode of seeing the countryside in a series of pictures, a view being framed either by nature in the form of, for instance, trees, or the visual contrivance of the viewer. Its particular proponent was William Gilpin who defined the picturesque in 1768 as 'a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture'.<sup>123</sup> Gilpin's way of looking at a view had the effect of linking nature to painting or drawing, and no doubt lies behind Scott's wish to learn to draw.<sup>124</sup>

The Vale of Keswick was also the subject of the earliest poem devoted solely to describing the Lake District. After Dalton's lines on the area Dr John Brown (1715-66) devoted an entire poem to it, 'Night Scene in the Vale of Keswick.' Brown had published a prose *Description of the Lake at Keswick* in the form of a letter in the *London Chronicle* for 24-26 April, 1766. Brown died in that year, and the poem on the same topic was not published until 1776.<sup>125</sup> The poem, of 20 lines, is a description of Derwentwater at night. It describes a still night with the mirror-like water illumined

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<sup>122</sup> Grevel Lindop, *A Literary Guide to the Lake District* (Wilmslow, Cheshire: Sigma Leisure, 2005), p. 129.

<sup>123</sup> William Gilpin, *An Essay on Prints* (London, 1768), p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> Lockhart, Vol. I, pp. 125-27.

<sup>125</sup> Brown's poem, untitled, was first published in Richard Cumberland, *Odes, by Richard Cumberland, Esq.* (London, 1776), p. 5. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. Newcastle University. 5 May 2011. Both the prose *Description* and the poem are reprinted by William Roberts in his *A Dawn of Imaginative Feeling: The Contribution of John Brown (1715-66) to Eighteenth Century Thought and Literature* (Carlisle: Northern Academic Press, 1996), pp. 237-43.

by moonlight. The only human presence is the shepherd watching and listening for his sheep. The lake is quiet, the only sounds being those of the streams flowing into the lake. The use of moonlight anticipates Scott's description of Melrose Abbey by moonlight. This use of moonlight appears to be an early romantic feature, since on the whole both Wordsworth's and Scott's poems exist in daylight, although Wordsworth frequently mentions the light effects of both dawn and sunset, and Scott's plots sometimes make him use Gothic darkness.

Visitors to the Lake District encouraged the writing of guide-books. The first such book was written by Father Thomas West in 1778. It pointed out some 'recommended viewing stations and advice as to the best time to see the landscape.'<sup>126</sup> These guides originate in the idea that 'descriptions of natural scenery served, first and foremost, as an enticement for lovers of landscape to come and see the real thing'.<sup>127</sup> This made West, whose book was full of very detailed descriptions, reassure his readers that he was aware not to give away too much so as not to spoil their pleasant surprise at seeing the place for themselves.

The increasing popularity of travel literature saw Wordsworth write in 1810 what would later develop to be one of his most enduring works: *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes in the North of England, with a Description of the Scenery, etc. For the Use of Tourists and Residents*. First written as an introduction to a set of drawings by Joseph Wilkinson, the *Guide* was published as a separate, expanded volume in 1822. Wordsworth's *Guide* is unique in that it offers an insider's perspective of a place he loves dearly with its inhabitants, nature, and culture. It is perhaps most peculiarly known for Wordsworth's request that the reader adopt the

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<sup>126</sup> 'Guidebooks and Travel Literature' <

[http://www.johndobson.info/Tourists/NumberedPages/Page\\_14.php](http://www.johndobson.info/Tourists/NumberedPages/Page_14.php) > [accessed 18 July 2011]

<sup>127</sup> Stephen Hebron, 'a Practised Pencil and an Eloquent Pen', in *Savage Grandeur and Noblest Thoughts: Discovering the Lake District 1750–1820*, ed. by Cecilia Powell and Stephen Hebron (Grasmere: The Wordsworth Trust, 2010), p. 29.

station of a cloud between Great Gable and Scafell. This allows both writer and reader to view the region as a whole, and from a privileged, central vantage point.<sup>128</sup>

### **Historical Context: The French Revolution**

Attempts at contextualizing the Romantic era usually begin with the French Revolution. This section outlines the most significant events of the Revolution both because of its great importance as a central historical event which has shaped the Romantic era, and because it provides the backdrop for some of themes discussed in Chapter II of this thesis. The Revolution as a concept serves another function important for the purposes of this thesis too: it showcases the status place held for both Wordsworth and Scott. The importance of the Lake District for Wordsworth is made clear through his appreciation and portrayal of the shepherds in that region. The shepherd figure represents the eternal spiritual values Wordsworth held so highly and thought all men can adopt through a process of change and evolution. Change was perhaps more difficult for Scott to accept, especially given his love for history and its preservation.

Following this section, a brief account will be given of the British reception of the ideals of the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. This account is designed to place the two writers' reactions – which has already been hinted at – toward those historical occurrences within their broader context.

Although the French Revolution was arguably the single most important series of events to characterize the Romantic era, historians seem to disagree about almost all aspects of the Revolution—even its very existence is sometimes contested.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes*, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 22.

<sup>129</sup> Robin Jarvis, *The Romantic Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1789–1830* (Harlow: Longman: 2004), p. 1.

Defining the Revolution as a historical event to be identified with the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 is misleading. The Revolution was not a single event: it was a series of complex and overlapping occurrences which cannot be viewed in isolation of their historical context. These events could be aptly defined as ‘the product of accumulating tensions and discontents at all levels of society, exaggerated by accidents of nature and given expression in a new political vocabulary disseminated by Enlightenment thinkers.’<sup>130</sup>

Throughout the 1740s and 1750s the British and French fought incessantly for European dominance and traditional trade and slave routes. The war left France with an enormous debt because its expenses had been paid for through loans rather than tax increases. The last of these wars took place in 1781. In 1786 tax revenues declined and a financial crisis ensued.<sup>131</sup> When the reform plan proposed by Calonne, the then finance minister,<sup>132</sup> and approved by the King, fell apart, bankruptcy was declared and Louis was left completely powerless. It was soon afterwards announced that the Estates-General would convene in 1789 to discuss the situation in the country.<sup>133</sup>

But the crisis was not only financial: France was an absolute monarchy, and the people, especially the lower classes, were oppressed and had no say in the way their country was run. The ignorance, poverty, injustice, and inequality arising from France’s hierarchical class system contributed to the widespread frustration which circumstances pushed to the point of explosion. Taxes epitomized discrimination in the French society too: they primarily fell on those least capable of paying them.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>132</sup> The plan comprised fiscal reform involving a land tax without exemptions, the universalization of representative government, the abolition of internal customs barriers, forced labour on the roads, and controls over the grain trade.

<sup>133</sup> Last convening in 1614, the Estates-General was a general assembly representing the French estates of the realm: the nobility, the clergy, and everybody else. They voted by order, which meant that any two orders could outvote the third. This clearly meant that the lower classes would potentially be almost always outvoted. They revolted, led by Abbé Sieyès, demanding equal representation and taxation.

While the poor could not avoid taxes, some of the powerful and rich paid as much- or as little- as they liked. Nature took part in igniting the rising tensions further too when a severe hailstorm hit the northern part of France just before the monarchy fell into bankruptcy in 1789. The storm destroyed the most part of the ripening harvest; bread prices increased sharply and people had to spend most of their income on food.

What happened next began as a relatively peaceful uprising which gradually turned into a violent movement, destroying everything in its way and uprooting the monarchy alongside the established social and religious orders. The Estates-General, now called the National Assembly, abolished feudalism on 4 August 1789, sweeping away both the seigneurial rights of the nobility and the tithes gathered by the Church. On 26 August 1789, the Assembly promulgated the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, which was probably influenced by ideas maintained by Enlightenment thinkers, such as their belief in equality among people, their right to freedom and a fair and just form of government. Theorists also influenced people by drawing their attention to social and religious injustices and excesses committed by the government and nobility. In 1791 the Assembly established the rules for a constitutional monarchy, ‘granting the King limited powers of veto on new laws’; the King was from then on forced to share power with the Assembly.<sup>134</sup> On 5 October 1789 thousands of women marched on Versailles where the King lived with his family to coerce him into accepting the new constitution. The women stormed the palace and threatened the life of the Queen. On 20 June 1791 the King and his family tried to flee the country in disguise, but were caught in Varennes and brought back to Paris in public disgrace. The King’s failed escape attempt both deepened the suspicion of the revolutionaries about his intentions and sent a serious message to

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 45.



monarchs across Europe of the danger which not only threatened the French royal family, but probably them too, especially that Marie-Antoinette was the sister of the Austrian Emperor Leopold II. Austria and Prussia issued the Declaration of Pillnitz in August 1791, in which they threatened military intervention to protect the royal family. France responded by declaring war on Austria on 20 April 1792. When the Prussian commander ‘threatened to destroy Paris if the king was harmed,’ Louis was officially identified with the enemy, his palace attacked and his Swiss life-guards massacred while he took refuge with the National Assembly. The monarchy was suspended in August 1792, and the Convention was elected to put together a new republican constitution for the country.<sup>135</sup> Following the September Massacres and the victory of the French army over the invading Prussian allied army in 1792, the French now turned to the royal family, publicly executing Louis and Mary-Antoinette on 21 January and 16 October 1793, respectively. With renewed foreign invasion on the outside and revolt in several French cities on the inside, the Convention adopted terror as the principle of government, led by the Jacobin leader Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794). As well as the execution of a large number of people, the Great Terror witnessed extreme efforts of de-Christianization. The Terror came to an end with the guillotining of Robespierre on 28 July 1794, which also marked the end of the Revolution. Now power fell into the hands of ‘more moderate and business-minded republicans’ who were not strong enough to keep the country under control for long.<sup>136</sup> A coup d’état led by the rising military star Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) established him as the absolute ruler of France from 1799 to 1815.

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<sup>135</sup> William Doyle, *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 50-51.

<sup>136</sup> Jarvis, p. 2.

## **British Involvement in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and British Responses to the Events in France**

France was almost constantly at war with at least one European nation since it declared war on Austria in 1792. What have later come to be known as the Revolutionary Wars lasted until 1802, when the Peace of Amiens briefly ended hostilities between France and Britain. The fledgling French republic initially fought the Revolutionary Wars to defend itself against European monarchies keen on crushing the Revolution and preventing it from being imported into their own countries. Gradually, however, a more imperial side to the French 'foreign policy' began to appear, especially as exhibited in the country's hostilities toward Italy and Switzerland, invaded in 1796-8 and 1798, respectively.<sup>137</sup> Britain got involved in the war 'partly as a result of traditional political concerns about the balance of power in Europe [and] about the new principles being proclaimed by the French.'<sup>138</sup> The Revolutionary Wars were marked by shifting alliances between different European nations, of which only Britain was the consistent partner in the many coalitions fighting against France.

War broke out again between France and Britain in 1803, putting an end to the peace which had only lasted a year. This renewed struggle was later known as the Napoleonic Wars, which were to continue for twelve years. These wars were different from the Revolutionary Wars in one important respect: France was now an aggressive nation with a clear imperial agenda which resulted in many battles fought across Europe, redrawing the map of power in the continent, and costing millions of people their lives.<sup>139</sup> France was able to spread its control over the most part of Europe, with

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<sup>137</sup> Nicholas Roe, *Romanticism: an Oxford Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 16.

<sup>138</sup> Clive Emsley, *Britain and the French Revolution* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 53.

<sup>139</sup> Nigel Aston, *The French Revolution 1789–1804: Authority, Liberty, and the Search for Stability* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 213.

Britain being the only nation to evade invasion, before Bonaparte was defeated at Waterloo (1815) and subsequently exiled to St Helena. The most significant outcome of the Napoleonic Wars was that Britain became the main European power, succeeding France itself.

The breach of the Peace of Amiens in 1803 not only heralded a new phase in the war, but it was also for some people the last straw in a series of events which forever destroyed their faith in the French Revolution and its ability to live up to its early proclaimed ideals. Enthusiasm for the Revolution in its early days was immense: in Britain, for example, this ground-shaking event was ‘widely welcomed,’ and ‘immediately recognized as enormously important.’<sup>140</sup> Shelley famously responded to the Revolution by calling it ‘the master theme of the epoch in which we live,’<sup>141</sup> Coleridge rejoiced at the fall of the Bastille, looking forward to a future where ‘Liberty the soul of Life shall reign,/Shall throb in every pulse, shall flow thro’ every vein!’<sup>142</sup> and Wordsworth believed that it was a privilege to witness such a moment in history first-hand, ‘Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/But to be young was very heaven!’<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, a fast succession of increasingly violent events breaking out in the name of the Revolution made a lot of people revise their initial stance on it. There was, for example, the violent overthrow of Louis in 1792 and his execution early the following year, the September Massacres, the outbreak of war between France and England in 1793, and the Reign of Terror. These violent and shocking convulsions, which reached their absolute peak in the coronation of Napoleon as Emperor in 1804, gradually lost France the majority of its most devout British

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<sup>140</sup> Roe, *Romanticism*, p. 16.

<sup>141</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley to Lord Byron, 8 September 1816, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), Vol. I, p. 504.

<sup>142</sup> *Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 11, ‘Destruction of the Bastile’, lines 29-30.

<sup>143</sup> *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, p. 550, *The Prelude*, Book X, lines 692-93.

supporters. Wordsworth remained an ardent supporter of the Revolution even when his country was under the threat of invasion by the French. During the invasion scare of 1793, Wordsworth ‘had sat in church in turmoil, unable to join in prayers for his country’s victory.’<sup>144</sup> And when Louis was executed, the poet wrote enthusiastically defending his guillotining:

In France royalty is no more; the person of the last anointed is no more also, and I flatter myself I am not alone, even in this *kingdom*, when I wish that it may please the almighty neither by the hands of his priests nor his nobles [...] to raise his posterity to the rank of his ancestors and reillumine the torch of extinguished David.<sup>145</sup>

In an interesting development, Wordsworth set out for Ambleside in October 1803 to ‘volunteer his services with the greatest part of the Men of Grasmere.’<sup>146</sup> Contrary to what may be deduced from such a move, Wordsworth was not renouncing the principles of the Revolution by offering to defend his country against a possible invasion led by the same revolutionary government. It was more complicated than that: Wordsworth was still a radical at heart, but, through the act of volunteering, he demonstrated his evolving understanding of ‘the lure of power, and how naïve was his understanding of how societies function’ when he was still very young and idealistic at the onset of the events in France.<sup>147</sup> In fact, Wordsworth’s disillusionment with the Revolution, as documented in *The Prelude*, came a long time before he put his name down as a volunteer in 1803 – it took place in February 1793, ‘at the outbreak of war

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<sup>144</sup> Gill, p. 233.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in *The Age of William Wordsworth: Critical Essays on the Romantic Tradition*, ed by Kenneth R. Johnston and Jene W. Ruoff (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1987), p. 20. Italics Wordsworth’s.

<sup>146</sup> Gill, p. 233.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

between France and Britain,' making the description of his mixed emotions when he sat in the church unable to pray for Britain all the more intriguing.<sup>148</sup>

Critical in shaping public opinion in Britain during the French Revolution were political pamphlets. One of the most influential was Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Defending a chivalric age on the brink of extinction, Burke strongly refused the liberty the revolutionaries in France were trying to establish through 'wholesale destruction':

Were all these dreadful things necessary? were they the inevitable results of the desperate struggle of determined patriots, compelled to wade through blood and tumult, to the quiet shore of a tranquil and prosperous liberty? No! nothing like it. The fresh ruins of France, which shock our feelings wherever we can turn our eyes, are not the devastation of civil war; they are the sad but instructive monuments of rash and ignorant council in time of profound peace. They are the display of inconsiderate and presumptuous, because of unresisted and irresistible authority.<sup>149</sup>

Burke's *Reflections* played a significant role in polarizing public opinion in Britain. The country was no longer united in support of the Revolution after 1790, and this change was confirmed by two occurrences: the September Massacres, and the publication of Thomas Paine's response to Burke entitled *The Rights of Man* (1791-1792).<sup>150</sup>

*The Rights of Man* was the most prominent response to Burke's pamphlet. It challenges Burke's defence of precedent and its role in government. Paine (1737-1809) asserts that 'there never did, there never will, and there never can exist a parliament,' with powers extending from generation to generation, 'binding and

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<sup>148</sup> Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> *Romanticism and Revolution: A Reader*, ed. by John Mee and David Fallon (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 29-30.

<sup>150</sup> Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, p. 17.

controlling posterity to the “*end of time*”.’ He wonders further: ‘from what, or from whence, does Mr. Burke prove the right of any human power to bind posterity for ever?’ concluding that ‘Mr. Burke has set up a sort of political Adam, in whom all posterity are bound for ever.’<sup>151</sup> ‘That which a whole nation chooses to do, it has a right to do,’ he asserts, adding that ‘the exercise of government requires talents and abilities, and as talents and abilities cannot have hereditary descent, it is evident that hereditary succession requires a belief from man, to which his reason cannot subscribe.’<sup>152</sup> For British supporters of the Revolution, there could not be a more eloquent response to Burke’s ideas.

### **Historical Context: The Industrial Revolution**

This section aims at providing the background for Chapter Four: An Excursion in Nature, which is mainly concerned with Wordsworth’s social vision of nature, and his conviction that Grasmere, as a specific locale, is an ideal community capable of overturning the damaging effects of industrialization.

The term the Industrial Revolution was first used in 1820s ‘by French commentators,’ who witnessed ‘an economic transformation in England as deep-rooted, structural, and overwhelming in its impact as the political revolution of 1789 in France.’<sup>153</sup> The Industrial Revolution shared another characteristic with the French Revolution: it was neither a single event, nor did it take place overnight; it was a series of inventions and changes in the structure of production methods and society itself which took place over several decades, beginning, as many historians believe, around 1775 with the invention of the steam engine. The introduction of machinery

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., pp. 71, 73. Italics Paine’s.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., pp. 72, 86.

<sup>153</sup> Peter Mathias, ‘The Industrial Revolution: Concept and Reality,’ in *The First Industrial Revolutions*, ed. by Peter Mathias and John A. Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), p. 1.

into factories made little progress until the 1850s, when the new railway system—established in the previous decade—facilitated the movement of goods and helped industries, especially metal manufacturers, to make considerable progress. Large-scale mechanization was enabled by a series of inventions which took place prior to that date in three sectors: cotton, steam power, and iron. These leading sectors contributed the most to the economic growth by which the Industrial Revolution is usually defined. Innovations in the cotton industry led to the building of cotton mills, which made textile products widely available for much lower prices than before. The improved steam engine which James Watt invented was first used to pump water out of mines, but later helped power different types of machines, resulting in numerous factories being built in places where water is not necessarily available. The third sector is the iron industry, in which improvements in iron smelting were introduced gradually until charcoal was completely replaced with coke. This process of ‘slow growth and major structural change’ did not affect all areas equally: it varied from region to region, especially in ‘the pace and modality of industrialization.’<sup>154</sup>

London remained the centre of industry throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but other areas fluctuated in importance according to the advances made in their local industries. Towns were created near mills and factories to accommodate workers, and cities expanded as large numbers of people migrated into them in search of jobs. The areas where workers lived took very little regard for health and safety measures. Workers and their families lived in very small, damp houses with shared toilet facilities and open sewers. This resulted in breakouts of epidemics, such as cholera and typhus. A substantial increase in population in the first half of the nineteenth century, from ‘approximately eleven millions in 1801, [to]

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

sixteen and a half millions in 1831,<sup>155</sup> coupled with little chance of education, meant that children had to work, being paid much less than adults. Accidents at work and illnesses resulting from working in mines, factories, and as chimney-sweepers affected a lot of children, and mortality rates among the working classes due to disease and work-related injuries rose considerably. A new work routine was also introduced which involved a new work discipline in which people were required to work set hours, in contrast to the work patterns of rural life which were determined by 'nature' in the form of seasons and weather. Economically speaking, too, the working classes were the main victims of this revolution, especially at its start, as they 'got at least relatively, and perhaps absolutely, poorer,' whereas 'the aristocracy and gentry, and the professional and business classes, either prospered or suffered no adverse effects from industrialization.'<sup>156</sup>

The Industrial Revolution is a term which some critics take to be misleading. They maintain, as the above brief account demonstrates, that the revolution was rather an evolutionary process to which many factors contributed, and which happened over too long a period to be regarded as a revolution. It has, however, become too common to be simply discarded or replaced with another without much difficulty and confusion.

There was another, very important factor which contributed to the rise of industrialization, which was, just like all the other important incidents in the history of mankind, shaped by the age it occurred in. The Industrial Revolution was accompanied by another movement which was underway at the same time: the transformation in the hitherto agricultural Britain to a more industrial economy. By the middle of the eighteenth century, 'the basic capitalist structure of landownership—

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<sup>155</sup> T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> Robin Jarvis, *The Romantic Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1789-1830*, p. 22.



great landlords, tenant farmers, and hired labourers—was already in place.’<sup>157</sup> This transformation involved ‘the progressive consolidation of land in fewer hands in the creation of great estates; a sharpening of the distinction between owning and renting property [...]; a major redistribution of income from farmers to landlords; and the immiseration of the rural poor who were stripped of their common rights and reduced to increasingly insecure forms of waged labour.’<sup>158</sup> This shift was especially brought about by the parliamentary enclosure movement, or what is more commonly known as simply enclosure. The following quote clearly explains the process of enclosure,

Under enclosure, open fields typically divided into strips belonging to individual villagers, [...] together with surrounding areas of common waste, all of which was cultivated on an agreed communal basis, were rationalized into large holdings under a stricter definition of ownership, later to be physically enclosed by fences or hedgerows. A vital stage in the process was the abolition of ‘contingent use rights’ of gleanings, grazing, and foraging enjoyed by all villagers, which provided vital subsistence for those with no land to cultivate and valuable supplementary income for others.<sup>159</sup>

This, and other factors such as the bad harvests Britain witnessed in the war years, which pushed prices up, contributed to the decline of the rural culture which some people, including literary figures, were not happy to see go.

Industrialization heralded an era of commercialism, materialism, urbanization, and a utilitarian philosophy which invaded many aspects of life and was very much at odds with what the chief Romantic literary figures held most sacred.<sup>160</sup> Wordsworth, for example, expresses his concern and disapproval of the adverse conditions people work under in factories in *The Excursion* (1814), and states in his sonnet ‘The world

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>159</sup> Jarvis, p. 22.

<sup>160</sup> Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 99.

is too much with us' that our closeness with nature has been compromised as a result of our being absorbed in 'the world', with its 'Getting and spending.'<sup>161</sup> Utilitarianism was one of the new principles which became widespread, and which, although adopted by many, was distrusted by most Romantic poets and writers. It entails that things be evaluated according to their usefulness on a practical level. Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), in his novel *Lucinde* (1799), writes, 'industry and utility [...] are the angels of death who, with fiery swords, prevent man's return to Paradise.'<sup>162</sup> As a reaction to this tendency to idealize what is useful, uselessness in some things—especially beauty—became a Romantic virtue. For example, Stael's *Corinne* states, declaring her anti-utility stance: 'oh, how I love what is useless.'<sup>163</sup> For Shelley, true utility has an altogether different meaning which he explains in his *Defence of Poetry*: 'The production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense is true utility. Those who produce and preserve this pleasure are poets or poetical philosophers.'<sup>164</sup>

### **Previous Work Comparing the Writings of the Two Poets**

Despite the fact that there are several parallels between Scott's and Wordsworth's lives and a continuous friendship which combined them for nearly thirty decades, this does not seem to have initiated any systematic studies bringing the two writers together in a sustained manner. There are various critics who have made minor contributions to the topic, but a fully fledged project remains missing. This lack of comparisons between Scott and Wordsworth probably arises from the fact that Scott's reputation as a poet was sinking as Wordsworth's rose higher and higher. Scott is more widely known as a novelist now, and the overwhelming majority of studies done

<sup>161</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Works*, p. 270, l. 2.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted in Ferber, p. 100.

<sup>163</sup> Ferber, p. 100.

<sup>164</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley: *The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), p. 695.

on him focus on his novels. By way of contrast, Wordsworth has always been known as a poet, which is perhaps why very few readers attempt to place him with Scott under one category. This is also why some comparisons already existing between the two writers examine poetic works by Wordsworth alongside Scott's novels.

William Hazlitt's comparison between Wordsworth and Scott is perhaps the earliest attempt to look at the two poets together. In his *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818) Hazlitt remarks,

Mr. Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. He is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses. His poetry is not external, but internal; it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song; he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. He is the poet of mere sentiment.<sup>165</sup>

More recent critics seem to share this view, more or less, regarding Wordsworth's poetry as looking inwardly rather than outwardly, whilst viewing Scott's poetry as doing the exact opposite. Alice V. Stuart, for example, compares two poems by Wordsworth and Scott which arise from one occasion: the discovery of a loyal dog guarding the body of her owner who died while climbing Helvellyn. 'Fidelity' by Wordsworth and 'Helvellyn' by Scott are being compared not only because they have been inspired by the same incident, but also because their authors' 'great names' are 'linked by their nearly coincidental dates of birth' and 'by a friendship over the years, beginning in September 1803'.<sup>166</sup> The two poems are used as examples of the ways the styles of the two poets differed, before the author rounds the comparison off with a further mention of the friendship between the two poets. Wordsworth's poem, Stuart

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<sup>165</sup> Janyce Marson, *William Wordsworth*, Bloom's Classic Critical Views (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), p. 65.

<sup>166</sup> Alice V. Stuart, 'Scott and Wordsworth: A Comparison', *Contemporary Review*, 224 (1974), 251–254.

shows, is a plain, austere poem which mirrors the austerity of the area it took place in and the dignity of the incident. In other words, it is a poem which originates in the impression the place has on the mind, which is then echoed in the description given to that spot. According to Stuart, the poem has given expression to the 'simple emotions of simple people'. Scott's poem exhibits different poetic skills: the poet here pays more attention to meter and poetic form, while adorning his poem with place-names and specific details about the 'Pilgrim of Nature' and his loyal dog. This is a poem which is concerned less with the self and its reaction to the incident, although it is by no means less engaging than Wordsworth's more inward-looking verse. Stuart concludes her article by giving an account of how the two authors' writing careers developed, stating that, although Wordsworth remained a poet and Scott became a novelist, this does not mean that Scott lost his poetic abilities. Wordsworth's later poetry was not as good as his earlier writings, she adds, choosing to finalize her paper with a quote from one of Wordsworth's great later poems which also brings the two poets' friendship together: 'On the Departure of Sir Walter Scott from Abbotsford, for Naples.'<sup>167</sup>

In a significant study on the two writers' relation with history, Kathryn Sutherland takes the inward/outward analogy a step further, discussing it against the background of the two poets' relationship with history and its effect on the imagination. She argues that 'the narratives of Scott and Wordsworth maintain that the present, for the individual and for society, unfolds through dialogue with the past and that the past only falls into place with the realization that it is gone'.<sup>168</sup> For both poets, the past is a worthy topic to be examined in its own right and as a means of

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<sup>167</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Poems*, p. 368.

<sup>168</sup> Kathryn Sutherland, 'Defining the Self in the Poetry of Scott and Wordsworth' in *Scott and His Influence*, ed. J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1983), pp. 51-62.

understanding the present. Reading some autobiographical passages from Wordsworth's poems such as *The Prelude* and the unpublished *The Pedlar*, Sutherland concludes that Wordsworth moves in his writings from history to autobiography, and that history, through its events and characters, gives rise in the poet's mind to 'primary emotions of [his] own nature'. The past, then, helps Wordsworth define himself. For Scott, it is the other way around. In Scott's poetry the 'self lends shape to history' through the writer's identification with the character of the ancient minstrel or the ballad singer. The minstrel in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* is a very old man whose physical and mental powers seem to be waning. Through acknowledging his feebleness, the bard, and, by implication, Scott himself, is preempting any criticism which might be directed at the credibility of his narrative. To further stress this, the minstrel informs his audience that he is telling the story as he himself heard it, thus allowing no room for any criticism directed either at him by his audience or at Scott by his readers. In fact, Scott's identification with the minstrel goes as far as creating a whole scene at the end of the poem in the hope that it might come true for him: in having the Duchess of Buccleuch bestow a little cottage on the minstrel when his lay is finished, Scott was indirectly expressing a wish that he could 'purchase the small estate of Broadmeadows adjoining the Buccleuch hunting-lodge, Bowhill.' Sutherland next contends that a reading of some of the two poets' writings in the light of each other can be illuminating. Thus, for example, she reads *Marmion* in the light of 'the configuration of past and present selves through whom Wordsworth's poetry characteristically evolves.'<sup>169</sup> She also compares the use of landscape in conveying Wordsworth's ideas in *The Prelude*, and the loss-and-gain process he depicts in 'The Immortality Ode' with those found in *Marmion*. Pointing

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<sup>169</sup> Sutherland, pp. 55-57.

out the main grounds for dismissing Scott's narrative romances by most modern critics, Sutherland concludes her article by arguing that Scott's longer poems are more consistent in their poetic expression and complex in their narratives than critics give them credit for. The 'structure in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion* as in *The Prelude* is a product of the poet's self-inquiry; the narrative unfolding by means of the lapses, digressions, self-criticisms, and justifications of its narrator'.<sup>170</sup>

While some studies have put the two authors side by side, others mention one of them in relation to the life or writings of the other. For example, Scott is mentioned in John Powell Ward's extensive discussion of the most prominent friendships in Wordsworth's life. Ward divides the poet's friends into different categories, including those he knew while still at Hawkshead or Cambridge, and whom he mainly lost touch with, and those he met later on in life and remained friends with all his life even though he did not meet them often. Scott belonged to this second category.<sup>171</sup> Peter J. Manning discusses the relationship between the two writers through a reading of one of Wordsworth's poems written as a tribute to Scott, namely 'Musings near Aquapendente'.<sup>172</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explain why Wordsworth and Scott are being compared together: there are enough similarities between the two writers' lives to justify a study involving them both, and enough differences to make such a study meaningful. Both

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<sup>170</sup> Sutherland, p. 61.

<sup>171</sup> John Powell Ward, 'Wordsworth and Friendship', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 15 (2000), 27-40 (pp. 28-29).

<sup>172</sup> Peter J. Manning, 'The Other Scene of Travel: Wordsworth's "Musings near Aquapendente"' in *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment: Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading*, ed. Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 191-211. 'Musings near Aquapendente', written in Italy in 1837 contains lines remembering the poet's friendship with Scott (William Wordsworth, *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845*, ed. by Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 742-56).

the similarities and differences have been made clear within the context of nature and place – the two major thematic concerns of the thesis – where possible and appropriate. The two themes have themselves been defined, and a background for the main events, ideas, and concepts referred to in the works examined has also been provided. There follows a brief outline of the remaining chapters in this thesis.

Chapter Two discusses the role the Lake District plays in Wordsworth's journey of truth and self-discovery, a journey during which undergoes a gradual process of growth until he can see 'into the life of things,' in a state marked by direct contact with God. When Wordsworth was a little child, this process was guided by nature through the employment of several agencies such as fear and love. In the post-school days of the poet's life, nature's role changed: nature was now a point of reference against which the poet measures the importance of his experiences outside the Lake District. This chapter traces Wordsworth's journey taken toward a better understanding of his own mind, giving a particular focus to the way nature helped to lay out the road for the poet and shape his growth. The importance of nature is also highlighted in Scott's autobiographical writings, pointing out the differences in the way Scott viewed nature as separate from him, an 'object' which has no spiritual existence similar to the one Wordsworth ascribes to it. The texts studied in this chapter are Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Scott's *Memoir* and the Epistles to *Marmion*.

Chapter Three shows the role that Border society plays in Scott's poems, and argues that he uses history and Border warfare to warn against the French invasion threat and promote unity between his country and England. The role nature plays in such a warning is highlighted in a reading of Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, arriving at the conclusion that nature here too is not more than an objective reality

which Scott used to his own ends, but never internalized as in Wordsworth. The chapter concludes with a comparison between the two poets' presentation of specific places in the form of Abbey ruins occurring in the texts studied in this thesis.

Chapter Four examines the way that a place – Lake District – has been used by Wordsworth to warn against the side effects of the changes society was undergoing as a result of such grand events as the French and Industrial Revolutions, which were transforming society and its individuals beyond recognition. 'Michael' and *The Excursion* are two texts in which this warning is most apparent, and this chapter aims at showing how it has been treated in them, especially through Wordsworth's employment of nature and place. This chapter shows how nature is never an object for Wordsworth, how it was possible for his characters to connect with it and find deeper meanings about themselves and life by realizing the unity that exists among all.

Chapter Five examines Scott's significant influence on Wordsworth's Yarrow poems, their relation to Border ballads and the characteristic Wordsworthian themes they exhibit. It also aims to give the three poems equal focus, something which readers usually fail to do. Texts to be tackled are 'Yarrow Unvisited,' 'Yarrow Visited,' and 'Yarrow Revisited.'



## Chapter 2

### Wordsworth and Scott: Nature, Place and Autobiography

Both Wordsworth and Scott wrote about their own lives. Wordsworth wrote *The Prelude* in a self-reflective vein, trying to analyze and understand ‘the origin and progress of his own powers’<sup>1</sup> and mind, whereas Scott wrote his first autobiographical account, *Memoirs*, so that ‘the public may know from good authority all that they are entitled to know of an individual who has contributed to their amusement’.<sup>2</sup> In its later versions, *The Prelude* is a substantial poem of at least thirteen books; *Memoirs* is a short prose piece. Despite the fact that these two autobiographies differ in many other respects too, they also have some similarities. This chapter looks at both works, especially in relation to nature and the way the authors’ closeness with a certain area affected them and their development. It argues that the way nature is depicted by the two authors is not the same: to Wordsworth nature in the Lake District was a source of truth, the balance he used to assess the worthiness of his life experiences, and a wise guide he went back to whenever fate led him out of his native region to seek meaning in the events taking place around him. Scott’s case was different: he did not make any spiritual claims for nature in the Scottish Border which remained a force separate from him, an object of admiration, enjoyment, or artistic inspiration. Whereas Wordsworth experienced the power of God within himself through nature at such moments as the Snowdon ascent, nature to Scott did not provide such individual revelations, and was resigned to the role of background for his writings, or served as

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<sup>1</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. by Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), Preface, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Scott on Himself: A Selection of the Autobiographical Writings of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), p. 1.

the vehicle through which the customs and traditions of a certain place could be highlighted. This chapter also aims at highlighting the similarities and differences in the two authors' autobiographies, which will be especially indicated in the final section. Before embarking on a study of *The Prelude* and *Memoirs*, a short overview of the history of autobiography writing will be given.

### **A Brief Biography of Autobiography**

Autobiography came to be known by this name in the early nineteenth century. Robert Southey is accredited with coining the term in 1809. Before this, it was known as self-biography. There exists, however, proof of an earlier usage of the name autobiography at the end of the eighteenth century in a review of Isaac D'Israeli's *Miscellanies*.<sup>3</sup> Autobiography became a distinct literary genre, as separate from biography, at the end of the eighteenth century, but it only peaked in the Victorian era.<sup>4</sup>

The first modern autobiographer is generally regarded to be Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78). Placing autobiography within a temporal framework spanning over two centuries, Eugene Stelzig states that Rousseau's writing is 'the foundational work of modern autobiography.' His *Confessions* (1782), 'by dramatically bringing a secular and self-exhibiting self into the literary limelight,' has been the instigator of 'the culture of celebrity that has become so pervasive in our personality and media driven world,' Stelzig adds.<sup>5</sup> Rousseau's novelty seems to especially rest on the importance he places on individuality, and on his unprecedented portrayal of man in a state of nature, as Huntington Williams contends: 'Rousseau, conceding that his portrayal of natural man has no actual reference, goes on to claim that it has value as a

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Romantic Autobiography in England*, ed. by Eugene L. Stelzig (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 1.

guide for judgement. Carrying this claim into his autobiographical activity makes him the first modern autobiographer.’<sup>6</sup>

In discussing autobiography, some major works usually recur as the predecessors of Rousseau. The main such work is Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (c. AD 398-400), in which all Western autobiography is thought to have originated, ‘both in the sense of making a historical beginning and of setting up a model for other, later texts,’ as Linda Anderson states.<sup>7</sup> Other important texts include the *Essays* (1580) of Michel de Montaigne (1533-92) drawing on his own thoughts and experiences, and the puritan *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) by John Bunyan (1628-88), which had a substantial influence throughout the following century.

Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* are, like Bunyan’s autobiography, a religious text. They both share ‘an emphasis on a search for unity with God which could redeem the self’s sinfulness and hence its incoherence.’<sup>8</sup> They are ‘God, not self-centred’<sup>9</sup> works, and herein lies their major and substantial difference from Rousseau’s autobiographical writings. Although they share a lot of structural characteristics with Christian autobiography, Rousseau’s autobiographical works have heralded a new approach to the question of writing about one’s life: that of ‘autonomous personal identity.’<sup>10</sup> Rousseau gives man the ability to ‘see inside the self that once resided with God [...] Self-knowledge [...] is inseparable from conviction or intuitive self-understanding, from “a knowledge of his heart” that

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<sup>6</sup> Huntington Williams, *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Linda R. Anderson, *Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Stelzig, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

belongs to him alone.’<sup>11</sup> This ability, and the autonomy it allows man to enjoy, will come to be one of the chief characteristics of the Romantic Age.

In the nineteenth century ‘autobiography came to be equated with a developmental narrative which orders both time and personality according to a purpose or goal.’<sup>12</sup> Thus, for instance, we find in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* that the arrangement of his life’s incidents, though overall chronological, is a-chronological at times, as I will explain later. The reason for this occasional reordering of events is the poet’s view of the manner in which certain moments in life fit into the bigger picture of how his development took place and what its most formative stages were. Sharing the characteristics of autobiographical writing common to other Romantic texts, such as the focus on individuality and the strong presence of nature, and departing from them in its emphasis on childhood experience, Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* is generally regarded as the most important Romantic autobiography.

Being an autobiography is one of *The Prelude*’s major appeals, especially because of its richness in Wordsworth’s childhood memories, some of which are not recorded anywhere else. The paramount significance attached to childhood memories as a pivotal factor in the development of adult consciousness has very few precedents, and is another of the poem’s strengths. Here again the influence of Rousseau could be detected – if never proven beyond doubt – : both *Confessions* and *Emile* (1762) reveal the unparalleled importance of childhood in forming one’s identity. *The Prelude* shares with *Confessions* in particular ‘a love for nature, solitude, and interest in childhood experience,’ as Anderson notes.<sup>13</sup> Scott, too, in his *Memoirs* and in the Introductory Cantos of *Marmion* drew on his childhood memories, especially those involving nature. The physical energy of the young Wordsworth climbing rocky cliffs

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<sup>11</sup> Anderson, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, p. 55.

and walking many miles contrasts with the closer engagement with nature of the young Scott, held back by his difficulty in walking.

The rest of this chapter draws on the autobiographical works of the two writers, tracing the role of nature and place in their memories, especially those of childhood and young adulthood. Inevitably a greater amount of space is given to *The Prelude*, as Scott did not attempt autobiographical writing of such range and profundity. The first section in what follows is on '*The Prelude*: Brief History and Aims'; the next two discuss 'Nature in *The Prelude*' and 'Childhood in the Lake District (Books I and II)'; thereafter there is a sequence of sections containing a contrast between the poet's experience outside the Lake District, in Cambridge, London, and France in 1791, each with reference to the Lake District, as a place of return or a place of memory. The chapter ends with a section on the climax of the poet's experience of nature, on Mount Snowdon, and finally a section on Scott, drawing contrasts and comparisons between the two poets' youthful experiences of nature in the Lake District and the Scottish Borders.

### ***The Prelude*: Brief History and Aims**

In the Preface to *The Excursion* Wordsworth famously tells his readers,

Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native Mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in Verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. That Work [...] has been long finished; and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination to compose a philosophical Poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; and to be

entitled, *The Recluse* [...]. The preparatory Poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself.<sup>14</sup>

Looked at in hindsight, *The Prelude* seems to have accomplished its mission: it confirmed Wordsworth's readiness to take on the 'task of his life' – *The Recluse* – by demonstrating that he has achieved the level of maturity, insight, knowledge, and understanding required to complete such a formidable undertaking. Wordsworth mentions *The Recluse* for the first time in a letter he wrote on 6 March 1798, telling James Tobin,

I have written 1300 lines of a poem in which I contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed. My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society. Indeed I know not any thing which will not come within the scope of my plan.<sup>15</sup>

The name of the poem was revealed in a letter to James Losh written five days later, 'I have written 1300 lines of a poem which I hope to make of considerable utility; its title will be *The Recluse or views of Nature, Man, and Society*.'<sup>16</sup> As is generally agreed, the idea of writing a grand poem on such an enormous scale was inspired by Coleridge, who had long aspired to write a long poem which would benefit others, but was forced to put the plan aside for various reasons.<sup>17</sup> As will be further explained in Chapter 4, Coleridge's respect for Wordsworth's poetic and philosophical abilities

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<sup>14</sup> *The Excursion*, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Vol. I, *The Early Years 1787-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 212.

<sup>16</sup> William Wordsworth to James Losh, 11 March [1798], *ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>17</sup> Coleridge was reading and thinking extensively at that time, which meant that writing was not going to take place right away because he still did not have a fixed philosophy to write about. He also realized he had to learn German in order to read the most advanced philosophy at the time, and when a long-awaited opportunity to visit Germany was made available by the general donation of friends, the composition of such a poem became an ever dimmer possibility. (Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 143.)

was great – ‘my admiration,’ he wrote, ‘I might say, my awe of [Wordsworth’s] intellectual powers has increased even to this hour.’<sup>18</sup> Coleridge’s inability to attempt a grandiose poem instantly, the fact that he found in Wordsworth’s poetry the perfect vehicle to express his own ideas,<sup>19</sup> and the fact that Wordsworth was already writing with enthusiasm in 1797, meant that he was best suited to take on the project envisioned by Coleridge.

*The Recluse* was never completed, and no poem was ever published under that name. Poems which were originally intended to form parts of *The Recluse*, however, such as *The Excursion*, which was to form Part II, and *The Prelude* were published, the former in Wordsworth’s lifetime; the latter, within months of his passing. *The Prelude* exists in three forms: *The Two-Part Prelude* (1799), the thirteen-book version (1805), and the official fourteen-book version (1850), which was published three months after the poet’s death. This chapter is a reading of the 1805 *Prelude*, which constitutes the first completed form of the poem except for the habitual revisions Wordsworth was to carry out for the rest of his life.

By May 1805, when the composition of *The Prelude* was basically finished, Wordsworth had known the answer to the anxious questions he had posed at the beginning of *The Two-Part Prelude*,

Was it for this  
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved  
To blend his murmurs with my nurse’s song [?]  
[...]  
Was it for this that I, a four years’ child,  
A naked boy, among thy silent pools

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<sup>18</sup> Letter quoted in Gill, p. 143.

<sup>19</sup> Coleridge used Wordsworth’s ‘Not useless do I deem’ to explain to his brother ‘the associationist psychology which underlies his remarks.’ (Gill, p.143.)

Made one long bathing of a summer's day [?]

(ll. 1-3, 17-19)<sup>20</sup>

The question with which the poem opens, 'was it for this' leaves the reader with two puzzles: what does 'this' refer to, and is the answer to the question 'yes' or 'no'? As many critics have suggested, 'this' refers to Wordsworth's inability to start working on *The Recluse*, which seems to imply that the answer to the question is 'no', nature has not been preparing Wordsworth ever since he was an infant so that he would lead an ordinary, idle life in the Lake District where he would only compose fragments of the grand poem he had always dreamt of writing. In the 1805 version, however, the question does not occur at the start of the poem, but at Book I, l. 271, which means that 'this' now has a precedent. The lines which come before the question begin with Wordsworth's pleasure at returning to the Lake District and his ambition to write a poem. After considering various historical subjects he turns to the idea of 'some philosophic song' (l. 230). He, unfortunately, finds himself later unable to start writing the poem, and blames himself for 'indolence'. In this context the answer to the question 'is it for this [...]?' is both 'yes' and 'no'. 'Yes' his early life and his return to the Lakes prepares him for a major poetic task, and 'no', he did not enjoy these early advantages only to find himself unable to start writing.

The frustration the question exhibits is, however, prophetic, and is one which will accompany Wordsworth for the rest of his life as he was never to complete *The Recluse*. It was indeed precisely 'for this' that the course of his life led him back to his native region to enable him to write *The Prelude*, which he never regarded as a separate poem, and never even gave it a name: it was usually referred to as the 'poem on [my] own life,' 'the poem on the growth of [my] own mind,' or 'the poem

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<sup>20</sup> *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (Norton: New York, 1979), p. 1. All subsequent references to the *Two-Part Prelude* of 1799 are to this edition.



addressed to Coleridge.’ It was his wife, Mary, who gave the poem its name upon its publication in accordance with her husband’s wish: he did not want *The Prelude* to be published in his lifetime except as a part of *The Recluse*, and, if that did not come about, only after his death. The poem which is now generally regarded as Wordsworth’s masterpiece, the greatest poem of the nineteenth century, was not worthy of such praise in the eyes of its own writer.

Upon first completing *The Prelude*, Wordsworth did not seem very happy with it. ‘I had looked forward to the day as a most happy day,’ he remarks; however,

It was not a happy day for me I was dejected on many accounts; when I looked back upon the performance it seemed to have a dead weight about it, the reality so far short of the expectation; [...] the doubt whether I should ever live to write *The Recluse*, and the sense which I had of this Poem being so far below what I seemed capable of executing, depressed me much.<sup>21</sup>

This negative attitude towards the poem may have been partly due to the fact that Wordsworth was worried about readers’ reaction to such a long, self-centered study, which could easily be mistaken for egoism: ‘It will not be much less than 9,000 lines,’ he informs a friend, ‘an alarming length!’ He then tells the same friend in a semi-apologetic tone, ‘It is not self-conceit, as you will know well, that has induced [me] to do this, but real humility: I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my own powers.’<sup>22</sup> Wordsworth, however, had nothing to worry about as his was not the first work to deal with the personal life of its author at length. His poem was part of the long tradition of autobiography already referred to, which tended to become more secular and centred on the self and its

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<sup>21</sup> Wordsworth to Sir George Beaumont, 3 June 1805, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. I, p. 594.

<sup>22</sup> Wordsworth to Sir George Beaumont, 1 May 1805, *ibid.*, p. 586.

development with the advent of Romanticism, especially as reflected in Rousseau's works.

### **Childhood in the Lake District, Books I and II**

One of the determining factors in Wordsworth's development has been the place he was born and grew up in: 'much favored in my birthplace' the poet announces he is, 'and no less/In that beloved Vale to which, ere long/I was transplanted,' meaning Hawkshead (I, 308-309). It is made clear time and again in the poem that Wordsworth would not have had the same natural education if he had not been born in the Lake District. He does, it is true, refer to more general natural features such as 'woods and fields' (II, 6), and 'Rocks and Streams' (II, 138), which are not specific to the area, but we know that it was the River Derwent, and not any other river, with its proximity to Wordsworth's family home in Cockermouth, that allowed the river's sound to mingle with the poet's dreams, and that made the stream Wordsworth's play companion, and not merely a river running behind the garden wall. It was also the specific geography of Ullswater which set the scene for the boat-stealing episode, and led to it happening precisely the way it did, thus making it possible to perfectly apply natural education through the ministry of fear, one of the two ministries nature used to educate Wordsworth, as will be made clearer later. The Lake District, then, as a specific place or spot that is associated with nature, is a perfect embodiment of the theme of this thesis: nature and place. The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the themes emerging from Wordsworth's treatment of the idea of nature as represented in *The Prelude*, with a specific focus on this treatment in passages dealing with one place – the Lake District. In particular, it tries to show how nature was

Wordsworth's source of truth and understanding, a measure against which he judged the importance of his experiences and made sense of them.

The way this idea is explored in this chapter is through a close examination of the circular movement in which the *The Prelude* progresses. As will be explained later, this exists in the poem a departure-and-return pattern which Wordsworth employs to emphasize the importance of the Lake District in his own growth as a person. It was only when experiences taking place outside of this place were juxtaposed with occurrences within the Lake District that they made sense and their importance became apparent. This chapter, thus, argues that the circular movement through which *The Prelude* progresses is a deliberate attempt on the part of the poet to showcase the high standing nature in the Lake District has for him as the ultimate teacher against whom all of life's experiences ought to be measured before their full significance is revealed. After each of his journeys outside the Lake District, Wordsworth came back either physically or just mentally – when actual return was not possible -- seeking such guidance.

*The Prelude* begins its narrative of childhood events in Cockermouth and goes on to follow an arrangement of the poet's recollections which – albeit mostly chronological – sometimes follows an a-chronological pattern. This may indicate the way in which the poet regarded specific incidents and their influence on his mind: the full implications of some events which took place early in Wordsworth's childhood were better understood in the context of later occurrences, and the significance of such events in his life was more evident when he was older. An example of this is the story of the drowned man he saw being recovered from water when he was a schoolboy was moved from Book I, where it originally featured in the *Two-Part Prelude*, to Book V. Wordsworth may have deemed the impact of death to have only

been fully understood on the rational level when he got older. This view is further reinforced by the fact that other early encounters with death have also been removed from the first book, including Wordsworth's passing by the spot where a murderer has been executed, and the death of his own father. This, however, is not to say that the opening book of *The Prelude* is solely confined to happy events.

Another tactical omission is that of the name of Hawkshead in Book I of *The Prelude*. The first two books of the poem are set entirely in the Lake District, and Wordsworth mentions some place names associated with his childhood adventures that took place within that region, such as the Derwent, Cockermouth, Skiddaw, Patterdale, Esthwaite, and Cumbria. It is therefore surprising that he would ignore mentioning the name of Hawkshead, one of the best grammar schools in the North of England where Wordsworth spent many a happy day as a schoolboy, and where many of the incidents recorded in the poem took place. He called Anne Tyson's cottage 'home,' which makes it all the more intriguing that he would refer to the place merely as 'that beloved Vale' and 'our small market village' where he was 'transplanted' from Cockermouth, thus making it almost impossible for readers who are not familiar with his life to discern where this valley is (I, 308-310; II, 35). Wordsworth's hiding the name of his grammar school in the first book is, I suggest, in keeping with the premeditated plan he has of expressing the way his mind has been influenced by outer stimuli. The ultimate influence on him as a child, he believed, was nature, and he did his best to give this impression by choosing to delay the mention of his formal education till later. Such omissions, and the rearrangement of certain incidents featured in *The Prelude* is taken yet another step further when the aforementioned pattern of going back to nature to seek meaning and closure is explored. Before this pattern of departure-and-return is discussed, some explanation ought to be made of

the relationship between Wordsworth and nature as a presence and power he interacted with and was influenced by before venturing out of the Lake District, as well as the way nature is portrayed in *The Prelude* to have delivered her teachings to the poet ever since he was a child.

Nature's education of Wordsworth manifests itself in two major ways: education conducted through the ministries of beauty and fear, 'Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up/Fostered alike by beauty and by fear,' the poet announces (I, 305-306). The beautiful river Derwent, for example, 'loved'—as if almost consciously—to 'blend his murmurs with [Wordsworth's] Nurse's song' (I, 273-274). It is more than just a river to the little child, and Wordsworth addresses it as if it were a living being: 'Thou, O Derwent,' adding in a description of the river, which the poet refers to using the personal pronoun 'he': 'He was a Playmate whom we dearly loved' (I, 290). The stream is one of Wordsworth's earliest links to the wisdom he is later to receive at full and try to convey to humanity: The Derwent, 'composed my thoughts/To more than infant softness, giving me, [...]/A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm/Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves' (I, 281-285).

The ministry of beauty also worked by refining Wordsworth's character and removing from it a lot of the base feelings and impulses which are not in keeping with the qualities of a 'prophet of nature,' as Wordsworth believed he was. Less desired traits such as jealousy, vanity, and pride were toned down as a result of their being 'interfused with objects which subdued and tempered them' (II, 67-72). This happened as Wordsworth and his schoolmates ran races on Windermere. They would land on one of three small islands on the lake: the first was 'an Island musical with birds/That sang for ever'; the second was 'sown/With lilies of the valley like a field'; the last had 'An old stone Table, and a mouldered Cave,/A Hermit's history' (II, 59-

65). Landing on such islands made the boys feel that they were in the presence of something far greater than themselves, something eternal which exists outside the boundaries and limitations of human life. The ruins on the third island showed Wordsworth how temporary human life is, and how nature outlives all those who once thought they were invincible and that they were going to live forever. The ruins have been assimilated into the larger natural picture, becoming one with nature just as all human beings will one day be. The birds have been singing on the first island from time immemorial, and will continue to do so long after Wordsworth has grown too old to row. The lilies adorning the second island, moreover, will continue to be reborn anew every spring while man withers away and dies in the span of a few short decades. These thoughts humbled the boys and made them aware of their limited abilities and the infinite power of nature:

In such a race,  
 So ended, disappointment could be none,  
 Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy  
 [...]  
 The pride of strength  
 And the vain-glory of superior skill  
 Were interfused with objects which subdued  
 And tempered them.

(II, 65-72)

Nature's ministry, however, can be 'severe' too. The poet tells us how he sometimes did things for which he had been reproved by nature. These incidents mostly took place at moments when Wordsworth was acting on an impulse: 'a strong desire/O'erpowered my better reason,' he says, describing how he sometimes stole woodcocks which other boys had snared, and how he would also be 'a fell destroyer'

on such occasions (I, 309-28). When an act like this has been performed, nature made sure that the boy was reproached: 'I heard among the solitary hills/Low breathings coming after me, and sounds/Of undistinguishable motion' (I, 329-31). The stealing of the boat on Ullswater is also described as having taken place on an impulse: 'No sooner had I sight of this small Skiff,/Discovered thus by unexpected chance,/Than I unloosed her tether and embarked' (I, 380-382). The outcome was well suited to the gravity of the sin: a huge cliff famously reared its head from beyond the smaller hills which obscured it at first and 'like a living thing,/Strode after [Wordsworth]' (I, 411-12). This incident had such a deep impact on the poet that, for several days afterwards, 'huge and mighty forms that do not live/Like living men moved slowly through [his] mind/By day and were the trouble of [his] dreams' (I, 425-427). The harmony and peace usually present in Wordsworth's mind were lost after the act of theft was committed. This was nature's way of teaching the poet that what he did was wrong, a violation of the natural law which needs to be corrected using severe measures.

There has generally been disagreement between critics as to what the Stolen Boat episode signifies. Some notable readings of the passage include Jonathan Bishop's Freudian interpretation, which has been contrasted in an indirect manner by Wood's Oedipal approach to Wordsworth's childhood experience. In his seminal essay entitled "Wordsworth and the "Spots of Time"", Bishop interprets the Stolen Boat episode as one of several other such spots of time which share among themselves a lot of similarities when examined closely, leading Bishop to believe that Wordsworth, in studying those significant moments in his development, was conducting a sustained exercise on his past experiences in order to make sense of them. This exercise was labelled by Bishop as 'self-analysis', and it characterizes

Wordsworth's endeavours throughout *The Prelude*.<sup>23</sup> Wood, however, disagrees with Bishop, reading the passage in light of what he terms the poet's 'Oedipal fear of the father' by which the 'uninterrupted enjoyment of mother nature' is 'rudely dislocated' by the intervention of the threatening patriarch, represented by the cliff.<sup>24</sup> Bishop's position appears to be more reasonable than Wood's, especially in light of the heavily self-analytical and 'self-educative journey' through different regions of the mind on which the poet embarks in *The Prelude* according to Abrams.<sup>25</sup> Given the great amount of criticism the theory of the Oedipal complex has received during the last century, it is doubtful that the true meaning of Wordsworth's experience that night lies in interpretations like Wood's. I disagree with Wood's reading of this passage not only because of the attack Freudian psychoanalytic interpretations of childhood experiences have received, but also because Wood's reading assumes that nature is not a unified whole, but rather schizophrenic, having two opposing sides: one side – the male fatherly side -- jealously hateful that Wordsworth is spending so much happy time with the female motherly side. Wordsworth rather seems to have seen in nature a nourishing understanding, not a divided warring self split as to what its own identity and motives were. Wood's theory assumes a certain universality to its Oedipal interpretation, both within the world of the poem and within human nature, which does not appear to necessarily be the case. Today, not all psychologists agree as to the negative Oedipal reactions associated with the complex relationship between the child and its parents. It also stands to reason that there are positive reactions in this family relationship, not just threatening ones based in destructive forces such as fear. Also, some psychoanalysts and psychologists feel that there are not many predictions that

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<sup>23</sup> Tim Milnes, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> Abrams, p. 592.



we can make based on the Oedipal complex, because there is no sure proof that it exists in the human psyche.<sup>26</sup>

To explicate the way nature's punishment of the poet worked after the act of theft has been committed, it may be worth looking at the way nature is portrayed to have affected Wordsworth's mind. According to the poet, nature's influence on the human mind in general is similar to the way music operates. He explains how,

The mind of man is framed even like the breath  
And harmony of music. There is a dark  
Invisible workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, and makes them move  
In one society.

(I, 351-355)

There are many different musical pitches, yet under a skilful composer they are all brought together to create harmonies. Nature for Wordsworth works as a composer, coordinating all the elements of his mind and arranging them in a smooth, unified manner. Musical scales, moreover, ascend, an octave higher, to the same note they have begun upon, and then descend back to the 'tonic' note, moving circularly towards resolution in their origin. This is highly representative of Wordsworth's journey, as his education by nature led him gradually closer to the origin of his life, and allowed him to understand himself and his relationship to nature more completely. The concluding lines of the boat-stealing episode echo the language Wordsworth employs in his description of the musical quality of the human mind: for a few days following the incident Wordsworth's mind was full of a 'darkness, call it solitude,' as 'huge and mighty forms,' or what he previously refers to as 'discordant

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<sup>26</sup> M. Daly and M. Wilson, *Homocide* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988).

elements' not usually to be found in the human mind, 'moved slowly' in his thoughts towards resolution (I, 419-427).

'(Surely I was led by her)' Wordsworth interrupts himself before recounting the story of how he stole the boat, in a sentence highly representative of the way he viewed nature: she had her own will, and natural forms were almost conscious in their dealings with the poet (I, 372). These forms, for instance, would react differently to Wordsworth according to the situation. The wind and the clouds are a case in point: the 'gentle breeze' which 'beat[s] against [Wordsworth's] cheeks, giving him 'joy' when he was celebrating his reunion with his native region at the opening of *The Prelude* changes completely upon the poet's stealing raven's eggs. The 'wandering cloud' which Wordsworth was sure would be his guide at the beginning of the poem too becomes a source of punishment for that same deed, 'oh, at that time/While on the perilous ridge I hung alone/With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind/Blow through my ears [...] and with what motion moved the clouds!' the poet exclaims (I, 346-350).

Being a chosen son of nature means that Wordsworth was exposed to experiences and visions others were unaware of. A lot of the stories told in *The Prelude*, therefore, involve him as a solitary figure who, in those incidents where he was with others, was separated from his company for one reason or another. He alone, for example, witnesses the earth's 'diurnal round' while skating with a group of boys on the lake (I, 486). He was separated from his friends because he stopped himself short by reclining on the spurs on the back of his ice-skates in order to watch the hills surrounding the lake race past him. In the Snowdon ascent episode, although Wordsworth climbs the mountain with others, he is the only one described as

experiencing the revelation in Book XIII: he had simply happened to lead the group up the mountain, and reached the top some few paces before everyone else.

The relationship between Wordsworth and nature grew stronger at school, with nature sometimes becoming an aspect of the poet's mind, heart, and soul, not merely an outside force that is separate from him. There are many instances in the second book of *The Prelude* where Wordsworth describes the experience of being in a state of oneness with the various natural forms about him. He, for example, relates how 'the calm/And dead still water lay upon my mind [...]and the sky [...] sank down/Into my heart, and held me like a dream' (II, 176-80). This took place as he was going back from the White Lion Inn on Windermere, having left a friend on an island on the lake to play his flute. It is perhaps worth noting that this experience took place as music was playing away in the distance. The sky and water seem to have become a part of the musical piece Wordsworth was listening to, combining within him just like musical notes, one occupying a lower position within his heart, and the other a higher one within his mind. Wordsworth has himself become the instrument through which the music of the nature around him is being played. Wordsworth viewed musical harmony as representative of the harmony among the different components of the universe, and he seems to be always looking for this harmony. The significance of sound to the poet is emphasized in more than one place in the poem, such as Wordsworth's account of how he would often 'walk alone' in nature, feeling

Whatever there is of power in sound  
To breathe an elevated mood, by form  
Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,  
Beneath some rock listening to sounds that are  
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,

Or make their dim abode in distant winds.

(II, 321–329)

Sound has a direct effect on the soul; it addresses it without the distraction of sight, which is more concerned with outward appearances and form, and tends not to perceive what lies beyond them. The physical sense of sight seems at this stage of Wordsworth's development to be played down, outward forms and shapes assuming less of a significance for him. He now thinks of himself as an entity that is a part of its surroundings and in a state of oneness with them, and this state takes less heed of appearances. The 'One Life' he felt running through everything around him was 'lost beyond the reach of thought/And human knowledge, to the human eye/Invisible, yet liveth to the heart.' And the song which 'all things' sang was 'audible,/Most audible then when the fleshy ear, [...] forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed' (II, 422–434).

When examining the relationship between Wordsworth and nature, which was one of the most important forces that influenced him growing up, it is not always easy to clearly define the various stages this relationship went through. In fact, Wordsworth's account of his own development is put forth in terms of overlapping stages with few distinct boundaries separating them. This, as Wordsworth demonstrates, is because it is extremely difficult to examine our own selves, determining where a thought originated, when a habit was established, or where a feeling has arisen from,

Hard task to analyse a soul, in which,  
Not only general habits and desires,  
But each most obvious and particular thought,  
[...]  
Hath no beginning.

(II, 232-236)

Wordsworth admits the challenging nature of self-understanding as it means separating the self from its past and from the environment, both of which contributed to bringing it about in the first place. The self cannot be studied in isolation from its surroundings for it is part of them, and, by the same token, it is impossible to study the elements making up the self. Thoughts, for example, have neither a distinct beginning, nor an end. A categorization of one's thoughts, Wordsworth tells Coleridge, goes against the unity in which one lives in oneself and with everything in this world (II, 227-231). In fact, Wordsworth goes as far as saying that the very act of 'creating distinctions' involves 'weakness' as it is an act of the fancy, not imagination. Imagination according to Wordsworth can only perceive the unity in living things, whereas fancy can view them separately. The danger of this method of dissection, Wordsworth goes on telling Coleridge, lies in that the mind later accepts the boundaries we create between things as if they have always been there, not that they are our own creation (II, 220-224). The idea of the impossibility of treating parts as separate from the whole, or, in other words, the idea of unity in the world, is one of the most important underlying themes in *The Prelude*. Through his ability to see beyond outward forms and appearances, Coleridge, to whom the true nature of things has been revealed (II, 217-220), enjoys a very exclusive privilege. 'To thee,' Wordsworth addresses his friend, 'the unity of all has been revealed' (II, 225-227). Coleridge is capable of perceiving things in unison because he too is a creature of the imagination: he is 'no slave' of fancy, as Wordsworth puts it (II, 220). Babies too see the world as a unified presence, and use their imagination both to perceive of this unity and to create the reality around them. They are 'inmates' of the 'active universe,' and their minds operate 'in alliance with the works/which [they] behold' in

readily, simultaneously creating the world and experiencing it (II, 274-275).

Wordsworth also speaks about the unity he witnessed as a boy in the way the sun and moon go about spreading light in the world over day and night. He loved the sun as a boy, and this was the result of his having 'seen him lay/His beauty on the morning hills, [having] seen/The western mountain touch his setting orb' (II, 188-90). The poet witnessed the sun exchange life and love with the mountain: he gave it warmth and light, and the mountain returned the favour by patting the sun on the cheek, thus expressing its gratitude and love. A similar thing took place between the moon and Wordsworth's 'darling Vale': the moon gave the place light and a sense of security at night, while the valley returned the favour by providing a welcoming, eternal abode for her amongst its hills (II, 194-202).

The boundaries separating every stage in Wordsworth's development from the next are blurred, and the poet only occasionally uses age references to mark the shifts between those stages. For instance, we know that Wordsworth was five years old when he played naked in the Derwent (I, 291), less than nine when he went woodcock snaring (I, 310-11), ten when he held 'unconscious intercourse/With the eternal Beauty' of the Lake District (I, 589-90), and sixteen when he 'felt the sentiment of Being spread/O'er all that moves' (II, 420-21). But things are not always this clear-cut. Change is difficult to pinpoint in terms of the place and manner it has occurred, and this foggy, elusive nature matches Wordsworth's statement about the difficulty of analyzing the soul. When one looks back on one's life, the mental picture one sees is full of impurities resulting from habit, forgetfulness, shifts in feelings, and the nature of memory itself, which often tends to mix what is real with what is imaginative. This is why one becomes 'two consciousnesses': 'conscious of [one]self/And of some other Being' (II, 32-33). Things also change in themselves, which makes the gap

between the older and younger selves even wider. The 'grey Stone' which was in the centre of Hawkshead Square was removed to build Hawkshead Town Hall (II, 33-40). For all those who knew the place before the stone had been moved, memories of it will always mingle with the new reality of the town centre, thus making it impossible to experience the place for what it is, just as traces of people's old selves will always gleam and resurface when they think of the past. Wordsworth likens this to a traveler on a boat, who tries to see what lies down on the bed of the lake. He can make out a lot of things, but it is very difficult for him to separate the real objects from the shadows and reflections of his own body, and of the clouds and mountains around the lake. It is impossible to gain a true perspective of the reality of such a scene, and is equally impossible to give a perfectly accurate account of one's past (IV, 247-261).

Wordsworth's relationship with nature took a major turn when he was sixteen. Up till then, the poet was still unaware of his strong connection with nature, and she continued to be an observer of his life, a passive presence making up its background. Nature provided the poet with 'nourishment that came unsought,' and was 'collaterally attached/To every scheme of holiday delight' (II, 7, 52-53). The sixteenth year of Wordsworth's life was the time when change occurred: nature began to be 'sought for her own sake,' and did not just happen to be present out there wherever he went and whatever he did, a mere beautiful scene to be looked at (II, 203-208).

Wordsworth became finally aware that he was part of this all-encompassing whole, and one with it. He was now actively involved in creating the world around him as he went on. He 'bestowed new splendor on the setting sun' using his mind (II, 387-389), and 'transferred [his] own enjoyments' on to 'unorganic natures' (II, 410-411).

Wordsworth's power at that stage resided in the fact that he had the ability to exert a certain influence over the world around him. He had come to feel that he was

‘spread/o’er all that moves, and all that seemeth still (II, 420-421), ‘conversed/with things that really are.’ He exerted ‘a like dominion’ on the ‘melodious birds,’ ‘gentle breezes,’ and ‘fountains that ran on/Murmuring so sweetly in themselves’ (II, 389-391). This new stage in Wordsworth’s life is characterized by supremacy of feelings over thought (II, 417-420). Feeling, according to Rousseau, is the foremost type of knowledge. It enables one to see within oneself and understand one’s heart through ‘conviction or intuitive self-understanding.’ This ability is especially enjoyed by “‘natural man” or Nature,’ who possesses a power similar to that which God has to see beyond facades.<sup>27</sup>

This supremacy of feeling which Wordsworth enjoyed as a schoolboy was overshadowed by reason during his Cambridge years, a time when his conscious mind took over and worldly passions and desires filled his heart. This becomes clear in the fourth book of *The Prelude*, which portrays Wordsworth’s first homecoming from university to spend the summer holidays. As has already been mentioned, and as will be demonstrated in the following section, the Lake District played a major role in balancing Wordsworth emotionally throughout his life, and offered him the opportunity to check everything he saw and learnt elsewhere against what he had experienced in Cumbria as a child and adolescent, which eventually helped him restore his faith in human nature.

Nature, then, was Wordsworth’s main teacher growing up. She employed agencies aimed at educating the poet and correcting his behaviour when he went astray. Wordsworth’s relationship with nature as a teacher went through different overlapping stages when he was still living in the Lake District. When he travelled out of the region, this relationship took on another form as nature became necessary to

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<sup>27</sup> Anderson, p. 44.



sustain the poet emotionally and help him make sense of the major events of his life. This process of self-understanding manifested itself in the form of a circular movement within which Wordsworth's life occurrences were arranged in *The Prelude*, beginning with his university education in Cambridge, as the following section will illustrate.

### **Cambridge and Vacation in Hawkshead, Books III and IV**

When Wordsworth became a young adult, the proximity with nature, which had hitherto been instrumental in the delivery of the poet's natural education through the employment of fear and love, was interrupted. It was at that stage of Wordsworth's development that the course of his life led him outside his native region to spend a part of his adult years. The influence of nature on Wordsworth's development at this time changed: it remained as strong as ever although it took on a different form. I attempt in this section to show how this new form of influence operated, and how it helped Wordsworth grow and become a mature person capable of making a very important decision in his life – going back to settle in the Lake District for good.

At the end of the second book of *The Prelude* Wordsworth ascribes his contentedness with his modest lot in life, his purity of heart, and his lack of base desires and feelings, to the influence of nature. She has always confirmed his belief in the goodness inherent in human beings despite the abundant, widespread evidence to the contrary. In a beautiful passage addressed to 'Ye Mountains and Ye Lakes,/And sounding Cataracts! Ye mists and Winds' the poet says:

If, in my youth, I have been pure in heart,  
If, mingling with the world, I am content  
With my own modest pleasures, and have lived,  
With God and Nature communing, removed  
From little enmities and low desires,

The gift is yours; if in these times of fear,  
 This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,  
 If, 'mid indifference and apathy,  
 And wicked exultation, when good men,  
 On every side fall off, we know not how,  
 To selfishness, disguised in gentle names  
 Of peace, and quiet, and domestic love,  
 Yet mingled, not unwillingly, with sneers  
 On visionary minds; if in this time  
 Of dereliction and dismay, I yet  
 Despair not of our nature; but retain  
 A more than Roman confidence, a faith  
 That fails not, in all sorrow my support,  
 The blessing of my life, the gift is yours,  
 Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed  
 My lofty speculations; and in thee,  
 For this uneasy heart of ours I find  
 A never-failing principle of joy,  
 And purest passion.

(II, 440–465)

Wordsworth seems to suggest that it would have been possible for him, having had such an eventful life, to stop believing in the goodness of man. It was nature who equipped him with a strong faith in human beings, and gave him the power to get through difficulty without losing this faith. The foregoing passage sums up a characteristic feature of Wordsworth's life: the poet experienced many things and travelled to many places, before he would go back to nature, either mentally or physically, or both, every single time asking for reassurance, emotional and

intellectual balance, and a renewal of belief in the goodness of human beings. He tried university life, politics, travel to London and Paris, and in each of these paths he took, Wordsworth seemed to have needed nature in order to draw the lessons necessary for his growth. Nature provided a counter-balance which helped the poet understand things and see them for what they really were. Nature was a point of reference for Wordsworth: he would check new experiences, beliefs, and values against what she taught him. This process of remote assistance, or, to use a very modern term, distance learning, conducted by nature in Wordsworth's post-school days, led him all the way along the path of personal development, which culminated on the summit of Mount Snowdon. Wordsworth's journey of youthful growth took on the form of a circular movement between the Lake District – which was his point of departure, various destinations outside the Lake District, and back again to the Lake District. This pattern of departure from nature and return to it recurs throughout *The Prelude*. In fact, this pattern not only manifests itself in the events Wordsworth describes in the poem and in its structure, but it also extends to its composition and frame story.

The structure of *The Prelude* is representative of the circular movement through which Wordsworth presents his development. The thirteen books are arranged in such a manner that after every book set outside the Lake District there is one either set inside or representative of some form of return to the region. Thus the poet's vacation in Hawkshead immediately follows his account of the first year he spent at Cambridge; his impressions of London come just before he tells us in Book Eight how his love for nature led him to love man; and his largely first-hand experience of the French Revolution is recounted before Wordsworth moves on to tell us in the concluding book how the revelation on Snowdon took place, and how he was finally reunited with nature. Several books in the poem, then, are arranged in a

circular manner with Cumbria as their point of beginning and end, and this is also characteristic of the poem's frame narrative.

*The Prelude* begins at its end, at a moment in time following Wordsworth's decision to settle down in Grasmere, before it proceeds to tell us how the poet came to this decision. Wordsworth relates his recollections in the form of an address to Coleridge, taking him along the path of personal development which culminates in Wordsworth's making up his mind that what he really wanted to do was go back to nature and live in the Lake District, never to leave again. The composition of some parts of *The Prelude* is yet another example of this movement toward origins which is characteristic of the poem: Wordsworth wrote some of the most memorable episodes of his childhood recollections when he was in Germany. The 'woodcock-snaring, Birds-nesting, Boat-stealing, and Skating episodes,' as well as the spots of time and drowned man episodes, were all written at Goslar between October 1798 and January 1799.<sup>28</sup> Wordsworth's mind went back to his native region in order to draw on an abundant wealth of memories, which were his only way to cope with 'the isolation and silence of that Goslar winter,' as Gill points out. This means of adaptation in a foreign land could be best summed up in one sentence: 'he turned in, intensely, upon himself.'<sup>29</sup>

The first round trip – both actual and figurative – Wordsworth takes outside the Lake District is between Hawkshead and Cambridge. Cambridge was the poet's first encounter with the world which lay beyond the boundaries of his native region. It was a world full of novel things he had never experienced before, and, once he related his new experiences at university chiefly in Book III, Wordsworth moved on to tell us

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<sup>28</sup> Note in the Norton *Prelude*, pp. 512-13.

<sup>29</sup> Gill, *Wordsworth: A Life*, p. 159.

about the first vacation he spent in Hawkshead.<sup>30</sup> As has already been mentioned, going back to the Lake District gave meaning to Wordsworth's other world – that of university life – and shed light on the transformation that was taking place within the poet at the time.

Cambridge dazzled Wordsworth. He felt important and proud to be part of this renowned institution. The poet's first day there was a 'fresh day/of pride and pleasure!' on which he regarded himself as 'a man of business and expence' (III, 22–24). For someone who has previously regarded pride as an unwanted trait, the foregoing statement may seem somehow out of place. But pride was pretty much at home in Cambridge. This university was one where, like many other educational institutions, people were taught to judge others and to be competitive. This was the result of students being judged themselves on hard work and exam results, Wordsworth talks '[of] examinations, when the Man was weighed/As in the balance' (III, 65–66). While this is the norm in education, it would necessarily lead to categorization. And indeed, the first time Wordsworth divides people into several groups, according to how hard they have worked at a given task, was in Book III: 'with loyal Students, faithful to their books,/Half-and-half Idlers, hardy Recusants,/And honest Dunces' (III, 62–64). Competitiveness, judgment, pride, and sometimes jealousy, are results of such a system—'of excessive hopes,/[...] small jealousies, and triumphs good or bad/I make short mention,' Wordsworth declares (III, 66–69), and in referring to the 'deeper passions working around [him]' he lists 'envy, jealousy, pride, shame/Ambition, emulation, fear, or hope' (III, 532–34).

As a result of living in the Cambridge environment Wordsworth changed, 'I had made a change/In climate, and my nature's outward coat/Changed also' (III, 207–

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<sup>30</sup> Wordsworth describes his life at Cambridge in two books, III and VI, but the second one is not solely dedicated to that. That is why I focus mainly on Book III in my discussion of the poem's circular thematic and structural patterns.

09). He began to view himself as separate from others, as someone who can judge, categorize and evaluate them. The poet lost his oneness with the world and other living beings, and consequently his inner self shut itself away: ‘the memory languidly revolved, the heart/Reposed in noontide rest; the inner pulse/Of contemplation almost failed to beat’ (III, 336–338). It was in Hawkshead that Wordsworth was reunited with nature and his inner soul once more.

Book Four, *Summer Vacation*, opens with an atmosphere of celebration, love, and a feeling of security. The young man who has been miserable in Cambridge was relieved to have finally arrived ‘home,’ as he has come to refer to Hawkshead (IV, 10). He regarded a lot of the things in Ann Tyson’s cottage as his (IV, 32), extremely valued the good old woman’s affection for him, and repayed it ‘with little less than filial love’ (IV, 28). She was as proud to receive the returning young student as a real mother would be: ‘so motherly and good,’ Tyson cried and ‘perused [Wordsworth] with a Parent’s pride’ (IV, 17-19). The poet was overjoyed to be reunited with the things he loved and was familiar with too, such as ‘the rooms, the court, the garden,’ ‘the spreading Pine/And broad stone Table,’ the moon moving at night with the rocking ash tree, and the ‘adopted’ terrier who accompanied Wordsworth on most of his walks. Wordsworth’s bond with nature was reinforced during this visit. He describes two significant revelations in this book, both of which seem to have been intended by nature to renew the poet’s faith in his role as a ‘prophet of nature’ – something which the easy, soft life at Cambridge may have obscured. In a beautiful metaphor, the poet tells how university life robbed him of his own voice and will: the little stream running through the cottage garden along a man-made channel is a symbol of what Wordsworth’s life has come to signify lately. Like Wordsworth, who was studying mathematics at Cambridge somehow reluctantly, the stream was a

‘Prisoner’ of the will of others too, and was forced to follow a course which they devised for it. This resulted in the little river losing its voice and vigour and turning into an imprisoned slave (IV, 39-55). Wordsworth, however, was determined to find his own path in life, and nature made sure he knew he was still a favourite son of hers.

The first revelation described in this book took place during a walk around Esthwaite water. Wordsworth saw, while circling the lake, glimpses of ‘the life of things’: his soul started to see beyond the visible aspects of nature as it ‘put off her veil’, discarding all illusions of outward appearances and judgment witnessed by Wordsworth in Cambridge, and entering the shrine of nature, a world where no illusion or affectation exists, just the ‘naked’ soul standing in front of its creator (IV, 141-42). Of sensory reality there were little traces left for Wordsworth to experience, ‘I saw but little, and thereat was pleased;/Little did I remember, and even this/Still pleased me more’ (IV, 150-52). As this experience began to unfold, Wordsworth ‘took/The balance in [his] hand and weighed [him]self’ (IV, 148-49). This is reminiscent of the metaphor the poet uses when describing exams at Cambridge: students were being judged on their knowledge, memory, and hard work in general, and these categories determined who the better students were, which, in an academic environment, could also slightly influence the way these students were regarded as people. What Wordsworth is weighing is, however, his own self, his soul which is beyond evaluation and labeling. The poet also had significant insights into life during this revelation: he learnt that the way to better oneself truly and everlastingly was by pursuing higher aims: ‘I [...] had glimmering views [...] how on earth,/Man, if he do but live within the light/Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad/His being with a strength that cannot fail’ (IV, 154–161). The ‘high endeavours’ Wordsworth refers to have little to do with academia where he had ‘easy likings, aims/Of a low pitch’ (III,

332–333), and where he and his friends ‘talked/Unprofitable talk at morning hours, [...] and let the stars/Come out, perhaps without one quiet thought’ (III, 251–59). By way of contrast, when Wordsworth walked around the lake the feeling he had was one of ‘consummate happiness’ which was, significantly, ‘steady, calm, contemplative’ as opposed to the empty chatter he shared with his university friends (IV, 130–31).

During the revelation Wordsworth had no such idle talk with nature: he ‘conversed with promises’ and thought of ‘glimmering’ things, such as ‘how the immortal Soul with God-like power/Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep/That time can lay upon her’ (IV, 154–58). Even the milder thoughts he had were ‘quiet’ and profound: he pondered ‘love,’ ‘innocence,’ and ‘repose’ (IV, 162–163). At this pivotal moment in his development, Wordsworth’s soul seems to have overstepped its physical boundaries to become a channel through which inspiration, higher thoughts and views could reveal themselves. He was reunited with the life soul, and as his soul expanded, so did everything else around him, such as the lake and mountains. As the poet’s soul began to expand, nature echoed this expansion, ‘The mountain heights were slowly overspread/With darkness, and before a rippling breeze/The long Lake lengthened out its hoary line’ (IV, 169–171). In such a state of unison, Wordsworth was able to hear ‘intermittingly a breath-like sound,’ as if in the presence of a living force, which he mistakenly takes for his dog’s ‘panting’ (IV, 75).

This vision seems to have come to Wordsworth at a time when he needed reassurance and guidance from within, for he did not want to take up the course of life his family had planned out for him. This revelation also anticipates the ‘high endeavours’ Wordsworth is going to be asked to take on as a poet throughout the rest of his life – efforts which ‘cannot fail’ because they have been commissioned by nature and are in service of her.



The second such revelation took place when Wordsworth was going back home from a ball. He had two miles to walk in order to get home at daybreak, a morning ‘more glorious than [he] ever had beheld’ (IV, 332). It was then that Wordsworth was made a ‘prophet of nature’:

I made no vows, but vows  
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me  
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,  
A dedicated Spirit.

(IV, 341-345)

But Wordsworth was an adolescent at that time, and strong passions were surging in his mind, driving him in opposite directions. The poet found it very difficult to withstand those natural forces within him. He admits that it would have been much better to ‘exalt the mind/By solitary study, to uphold/Intense desire by thought and quietness’ (IV, 310-313), while at the same time expressing the difficulty of doing so, as ‘the very garments that I wore appeared/To prey upon my strength, and stopped the course/And quiet stream of self-forgetfulness’ (IV, 222-225). As a result, Wordsworth was living in characteristic adolescent confusion: he was at once ‘grave and gay,’ ‘short-sighted and profound,’ and ‘of inconsiderate habits and sedate’ (IV, 347-49). He still felt the strong love he had always had for things that lay around him, ‘I loved,/Loved deeply, all that I had loved before,/More deeply even than ever’ (IV, 270-72), but above all his young age meant that he especially loved ‘vanities’ and ‘trivial pleasures’—‘feast, and dance, and public revelry,/And sports and games’ (IV, 274-75, 288, 305).

The change in Wordsworth’s personality at that time extended to the way he viewed himself and others. The heightened sense of the self he felt, with its budding awareness of individuality, the need to express and confirm his own unique identity,

and the burning passions deep down within him meant that he could only see himself as separate from his surroundings, and indeed the fourth book refers to this on more than one occasion. Wordsworth tells us that he has felt ‘A dawning, even as of another sense,/A human-heartedness about my love / For objects hitherto the gladsome air/Of my own private being’ (IV, 224-227). Those things used to be an integral part of him, the ‘air’ he breathed to stay alive and keep connected with the rest of the world, but they have now become mere ‘objects’ he looks at and studies from a distance, before passing his own judgment on them. ‘Now there opened on me other thoughts,’ he says, ‘of change, congratulation, and regret,/A new-born feeling’ (IV, 231-233). The boy who ran races with his friends on Windermere at the beginning of the second book, for instance, and who was happy that all parties involved, be they winners or losers, were satisfied at the end and not given to pride and vanity, tells us in the fourth book how he came back to Hawkshead proud of his achievement at Cambridge, ‘Among my Schoolfellows I scattered round/A salutation that was more constrained,/Though earnest, doubtless with a little pride’ (IV, 63-65). In the second book Wordsworth talks about his life from a collective point of view, as experience constantly shared with others or with nature in complete ‘self-forgetfulness’: ‘we lived/A round of tumult. Duly were our games/Prolonged,’ ‘we ran a boisterous race,’ ‘no delicate viands sapped our bodily strength,’ ‘for in all things/I saw one life, and felt that it was joy’ (II, 8-10, 48, 79, 429-30). The fourth book, nonetheless, shows Wordsworth as a more isolated person who is deliberately doing things on his own, not in a group as he used to do before: he now walked around the lake alone, and went out to compose poetry with just the dog as his companion. This new, changed Wordsworth is looking at the world from without, and constantly judging it: the people living in Hawkshead were to him now ‘plain-living

people,' Ann Tyson's talk and business 'pleased' him, and her 'stream of piety' he deemed 'clear though shallow' (IV, 200-221). The natural forms Wordsworth has, up till adolescence, seen as eternal, and with which he has had a strong affinity up till then, are now seen as detached mortal objects. This is because he is now regarding these objects in a subjective manner, thus projecting his own mortality on them,

Whatever shadings of mortality  
 Had fallen upon these objects heretofore  
 Were different in kind; not tender: strong,  
 Deep, gloomy were they and severe, the scatterings  
 Of Childhood.

(IV, 240-44)

Wordsworth seems to be looking at the world from a different vantage point to that of his pre-university days. Back then he still had an instinctive knowledge of the world and of the unity in all things, but now he is fully aware of his existence on an individual, physical – hence necessarily mortal – level, and is perceiving the world through his senses, which have developed to become so sharp now that he is nearing maturity.

Wordsworth, then, has entered a new phase in his life, one in which the self was, partly due to the influence of university life at Cambridge, regarded as being in competition with others from whom the self is also both separate and different. This was a dark, unknown world for the poet, and he was about to come face to face with its reality and to see the consequences of having to experience it in the person of the discharged soldier whom Wordsworth met by accident one night. The soldier represents the hitherto unknown world of prejudice, bias, and separateness the poet has just begun to witness as an adolescent, while simultaneously anticipating the stage in Wordsworth's development he will have reached by the time he has embarked on

*The Prelude*: a stage where he has already lived through war, suffering, detachment, and injustice, and came out of these difficulties totally disillusioned with the world and its false values and principles. When the two men meet, the discharged soldier stands in direct contrast to Wordsworth: he has left behind the world of deceptive outward appearances which Wordsworth has only recently delved into. The encounter with this man could, therefore, be seen as part of nature's education of Wordsworth through the ministry of fear. The figure of the soldier is indeed associated with fear and death: he is described as 'tall and ghastly,' and his mouth 'shewed ghastly in the moonlight' (IV, 411, 468); he had been in service in the West Indies,<sup>31</sup> which entails that he has been involved in war – an act which requires seeing others dualistically, as enemies whom it was necessary to kill lest one should be killed by them. Such an act is impossible when the oneness in all things is observed and others are regarded as extensions of the self.

Unlike the young Wordsworth, who was just beginning to experience the world at the time of the encounter, the soldier had learnt so much at war about life and human nature. He had gained wisdom and transcended this world. Wordsworth describes the man as an almost intangible being who is in the world but not of the world: 'a man more meagre, as it seemed to me,/Was never seen abroad by night or day' (IV, 408-09). On first noticing the soldier, Wordsworth describes him as an 'uncouth shape,' who is 'half-sitting, and half-standing,' his clothes were equally surreal, as it were, 'in his very dress appeared/A desolation, a simplicity/That seemed akin to solitude' (IV, 402–419). Unlike Wordsworth who was at that time extremely passionate about life and wanted to chase superficial pleasures, the soldier was completely indifferent in outlook. In fact, Wordsworth uses the word indifferent more

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<sup>31</sup> *The Prelude* 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), note to p. 148.

than once to describe how the soldier communicated with him and expressed himself: in his answer to the poet's question about his past, the soldier was 'neither slow nor eager, but unmoved,' and told 'a Soldier's tale' with 'a quiet, uncomplaining voice,/A stately air of mild indifference' (IV, 442-45). While he walked by Wordsworth's side towards the place where he was to spend the night, the soldier was 'in demeanour calm,/[...] solemn and sublime,' and 'in all he said/There was a strange half-absence, and a tone/Of weakness and indifference' (IV, 472-76). Through misery and suffering, the soldier has been able to see beyond appearances – hence his apathy toward the physical world: a stage which Wordsworth was yet to achieve through his own suffering. This gap in the level of personal development between the two men is marked by the way they walked: Wordsworth walked on his two legs, whereas the soldier used the walking staff he pulled from the grass. According to the riddle of the Sphinx, solved by Sophocles' *Oedipus*, man walks on four as a baby, two as a young man, and three – two legs and a walking stick – in mature age.<sup>32</sup> The discharged soldier represents the mature stage of human growth, and Wordsworth has, up until the fourth book, moved through the first two stages of the solution to the Sphinx's riddle of life.

It could perhaps be argued that nature has prepared the encounter between the soldier and Wordsworth so that the latter could have a glimpse of what it is like to go beyond the world of appearances: the staff, which traditionally symbolizes magical powers, seems to have been handed to the soldier directly by nature. Wordsworth observed upon first seeing the man that he had 'no attendant, neither dog, nor Staff,' but later he said that the soldier 'stooped,/And from the ground took up an oaked Staff' which has 'lain till now neglected in the grass' (IV, 416, 459-63). The fact that

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<sup>32</sup> For the origin of the Sphinx's 'riddle about the three ages of men' see *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. by N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 1009.

this encounter is part of nature's education through fear is further reinforced by the fact that Wordsworth met the soldier at night, which could also be taken to reflect the poet's own state of uncertainty toward the future, and the grimness of the situation he finds himself in at this transitional period of his life. Like the soldier, he seems to be caught up in between two worlds, unable to fully belong to either.

Through the first circular movement away from, and back into, the Lake District, then, nature helped Wordsworth restore his balance and evaluate his experiences elsewhere, as well as providing him with some insight into his own future through the encounter with the discharged soldier. For someone who had felt proud that he had at Cambridge become a man of 'business' and 'expence' – criteria which have little to do with who he really was – such an opportunity to regain some of his lost harmony and oneness with his surroundings was highly called for (III, 24).

### **London and Helvellyn**

The second major influence on Wordsworth's adult life is the city – London and Paris, which have different implications for the poet. London represents progress, industrialization, a focus on appearances, and an urban way of life completely divorced from his own country upbringing, while Paris stands for power and the quest for it – a stage in Wordsworth's life where politics was paramount. In the aftermath of both experiences nature was resorted to in order to help Wordsworth see things from a different angle and check them against what he knew to be real and good, as I will explain in what follows.

London was a source of 'wonder and obscure delight' for Wordsworth when he was a boy (VII, 91), and no other place which he had read about or heard of could compare with it. When one of his schoolmates visited the capital, Wordsworth was

disappointed that the boy had ‘the same appearance, the same body’ upon his return, and that there were no ‘beams of glory brought away/From that new region’ (VII, 101-04). The most puzzling aspect of city life for Wordsworth then was, however, not that their life in London did not make them look like enchanted creatures, but rather that they lived out of harmony with each other and with their surroundings: that they would be ‘next-door neighbours’ and ‘know[...] not each other’s names’ (VII, 119-20). London confirmed this view when Wordsworth got to see it himself, and added to it several other shocking facts about life in the big city. To counteract the influence of the several unpleasant experiences and encounters Wordsworth had in London, he writes about the Grasmere annual fair right at the beginning of the following book of *The Prelude* in a manner characteristic of the circular movement back to the Lake District within which the poem operates.

The main impression one gets of Book Seven of *The Prelude* is that Wordsworth liked London as a city, but thought it a place which brought out the worst in human nature. It was the ‘loathsome sights/Of wretchedness and vice’ he witnessed there that he was most critical of (VIII, 65-66). That is why he admired London most at night,

When the great tide of human life stands still,  
[...]  
The calmness, beauty, of the spectacle,  
Sky, stillness, moonshine, empty streets, and sounds  
Unfrequent as in desarts.

(VII, 631-636)

There was no peace in the city except at night, which is why Wordsworth seems to have only been able to enjoy it then. In fact, despite the fact that the poet describes his daily impressions of London in a very vivid and brisk manner, he seems to be as

relieved to have left the hubbub and crowdedness of its streets as someone who has just escaped from something he dislikes deeply: ‘meanwhile the roar continues, till at length,/Escaped as from an enemy, we turn’ (VII, 184-85). For someone who has always loved ‘lonely places’ (VII, 152), such a reaction is hardly surprising. Nor is it only Wordsworth’s love of solitude – everyone seemed to the poet to be disconnected from others and from their surroundings. People seemed to pass him by as mere images with no names, just ‘face after face,’ walking quickly without stopping for a second to catch their breath or look around (VII, 173). They, to him, had no past, present, or future attached to them, no human story he could relate to such as those stories he knew about the people of Grasmere, which created mutual grounds for them to communicate and share their happy – and sad – moments together.

The capital city had yet another unsettling side to it: it was a place of illusion where ‘Things that are, are not’ (VII, 643). Wordsworth describes London as one big stage upon which all types of shows are being performed and everyone has a role to play in them. Reality is masked in those ‘exhibitions mute and still’: drawings or sculptures which artists make, creating false backgrounds to make their objects look as if they have been captured in another part of the world (VII, 245-81). Senators ‘perform’ on ‘that great stage’ in the Houses of Parliament (VII, 522-23), and the prime minister delivers his speech ‘like a hero in romance’ (VII, 538). Even the service held in church is like a ‘public show,’ and the pastor leading it gets ready for it the way an actor would by undergoing a ‘toilette of two hours’ (VII, 548), before he delivers his speech through the employment of various techniques designed to influence his ‘captivated flock’ (VII, 566). Such techniques include changing his facial expressions and quoting several texts intended to ‘lend ornament and flowers’ to his own words (VII, 563). London, then, is full of ‘folly, vice,/ [...] lies to the ear,



and lies to every sense' (VII, 575). More importantly, the capital is also rife with of a dangerous phenomenon: 'all the strife of singularity,' which sometimes leads one to try to achieve distinction by any means possible, even if it meant hurting others or using them (VII, 576). Wordsworth observes this force at work several times: when he watched a play based on the story of the tragic marriage of Mary Robinson of Buttermere he thought it 'doubtless treated with irreverence' for it is a 'too holy theme for such a place' (VII, 318-19). Wordsworth knew the woman personally, and thought that her right to privacy ought to have been respected, and her pain taken into consideration before putting it up on the stage for everyone to watch. This woman, who in reality had a 'modest mien,' 'carriage,' and an 'unexampled grace,' was turned into a product to be consumed for financial gain, and any humane considerations were easily dismissed when compared with the amount of money such a show could yield (VII, 333-34).

Being made into a product to be consumed and devoured takes several forms in London. One of these is prostitution, which saddened Wordsworth deeply to witness: he grieved 'for the individual and the overthrow/of her soul's beauty' (VII, 431-33). The poet thought this an act which robs the people involved of their humanity, 'splitting the race of man/in twain, yet leaving the same outward shape' (VII, 426-27). The physical aspects of human life seem to be paramount in such a place, which means that beauty is of great importance. Wordsworth, however, believes that good looks are a curse in such an environment. He contemplates the idea that the very beautiful child he saw in the theatre will grow to wish he were dead long before he could witness hypocrisy and affectation all around him, and, worse still, engage in them himself. This child, Wordsworth maintained, would have been glad to swap places with Mary Robinson's son who sleeps peacefully in his grave, having

escaped a life where he would have been part of an act of deceit, a lie, and its product (VII, 355-56, 409-12).<sup>33</sup> Wordsworth describes the beautiful child in a manner which suggests that he too was part of the theatre the poet met him in, another actor in an endless play which is constantly being performed on the stage called London. The boy was placed 'upon a board' where 'an attendant of the theatre/Served out refreshments'; like a performer, the child was surrounded with an audience, 'a ring of chance spectators' (VII, 383-87). Being made a product for consumption extended also to people who were a little different, and to animals, both of which were used in street shows and fairs to attract people's attention and make them pay for the entertainment. Thus one show featured 'a company of dancing dogs', another, 'an antic pair/Of monkies' (VII, 192-94), while Saint Bartholomew's fair boasted an unrivalled collection of 'chattering monkeys dangling from their poles' (VII, 668), 'albinos, painted Indians, dwarfs,/The horse of knowledge, and the learned pig' (VII, 681-82). In fact, Wordsworth describes the event as a 'dream,/Monstrous,' another illusory show designed to deceive the senses (VII, 661-62). During the fair, the tents in which exhibitions were being shown received people who would enter from one end and exit from the other. Wordsworth observed that the place as a whole, and this aspect of it in particular, looked just like one big factory, with machines swallowing raw material and turning it into similar products coming out the other end, 'Tents and Booths/Meanwhile, as if the whole were one vast Mill,/Are vomiting, receiving, on all sides,/Men, women, three-years' Children, Babes in arms' (VII, 692-95).

Immediately following Wordsworth's description of London in *The Prelude* is a chapter dedicated to nature entitled 'Retrospect.—Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind.' It opens with an account of the annual Grasmere fair held at the foot of

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<sup>33</sup> The man who married Mary Robinson posed as a single MP and deceived the beautiful woman into marrying him. She later got a divorce and remarried a local man. (The Norton *Prelude*, p. 242, note 5.)

Mount Helvellyn near the village. This fair is juxtaposed with Saint Bartholomew's fair which concludes the previous book, and is contrasted with it in particular, and with aspects of life in the capital in general. This intentional arrangement of material is Wordsworth's second circular journey back to nature, one of several such journey recurring throughout *The Prelude*.

By placing the description of Saint Bartholomew and the Grasmere fairs side by side, Wordsworth may have wanted to show what a real fair ought to be like. In Grasmere there was unity and harmony among the people present: they were 'a little family of men' (VIII, 6). There was harmony between these people and nature too: they were 'embraced' by the 'immense [...] recess' where the fair was being held, and although they looked insignificant in comparison with the grand natural forms surrounding them, there seems to be a constant communion taking place between nature and people, rendering the villagers as great as those very forms 'For all things serve [the villagers]; them the Morning light/Loves as it glistens on the silent rocks [...] the reposing Clouds,/The lurking Brooks from their invisible haunts,/And old Helvellyn [...] And the blue Sky that roofs their calm abode' (VIII, 55-61). This contrasts sharply with Saint Bartholomew's fair which, Wordsworth says, 'lays [...] the whole creative powers of man asleep' (VII, 653-55). The people themselves reciprocate nature's love in Grasmere by making sure she is both served and respected. The 'gay green field' on which the event is being held witnesses farmers trading in local produce they grew themselves and in farm animals which, although 'uneasy at the voice/Of a new master,' will never be used to perform unnatural tasks like the ones the animals in London were forced to do (VIII, 5, 23-24). Here too there is a blind man, but unlike the one Wordsworth saw in London begging for money with a note on his chest explaining his story to absolute strangers, the blind man in

Grasmere is ‘mak[ing] music,’ with his dignity preserved and respected, in return for the alms people offer him (VIII, 27). Contrary to Saint Bartholomew’s fair too, ‘booths are there none’ in Grasmere, just ‘a stall or two’ (VIII, 25). This indicates that people are not being used as products to be swallowed by a giant money-making machine like that in the London fair before being thrown out once they have served their purpose. City life is also being contrasted with the ‘sweet lass of the valley’ who is selling ‘fruits of her father’s orchard’ (VIII, 37, 39). Unlike people in London who ‘look out for admiration’ and public notice through what they do (VII, 572), the girl is ‘half ashamed/Of her new calling’ (VIII, 42–43). She is not seeking attention by what she does; in fact, Wordsworth makes it very clear that she only sells her father’s produce once a year at the fair (VIII, 40). The girl, moreover, ‘blush[es] restlessly’ at the thought of being the centre of attention, a blush as natural and real as everything around her (VIII, 43). This blush is reminiscent of the one that appeared on the cheeks of another woman: the mother of the beautiful boy Wordsworth saw in the theatre. That other blush, however, is not at all natural: ‘on the mother’s cheek the tints are false,/A painted bloom,’ Wordsworth notes (VII, 373-74).

Wordsworth’s experience in London was an important stage in his personal growth. It showed him that there was a side to human nature he had hitherto been unaware of, a side full of greed, lies, competition, and lack of humanity. In order for him to make sense of such an overwhelming experience, Wordsworth had to go back to the Lake District seeking answers and some explanation of what he saw in London through an examination of similar occurrences and events that took place in Cumbria. This move back to his native region is a strategy characteristic of the progress of Wordsworth’s life as portrayed in *The Prelude* whenever he is depicted to have gone away from his beloved region.

### **The French Revolution and the Lake District Shepherd**

The third time the circular movement around which this chapter revolves operates in *The Prelude* is in Wordsworth's visit to France in 1791, which he undertook in order 'to speak the language more familiarly' (IX, 36). The French Revolution was well underway then, and the poet dedicates the most part of the two books dealing with his stay in France to this landmark event. In what follows I read Wordsworth's journey to France in light of his treatment of the figure of the Lake District shepherd. The comparison Wordsworth lays out between the ideals of the Revolution and those upheld by shepherds represents the poet's return to his native region yet again to draw the conclusions he needed from this experience and make sense of its intricacies. Nature here has proven once more to be Wordsworth's ultimate source of truth and the one reality against which all events have to be measured before proven worthy or otherwise. I argue in what follows that looking at the Revolution through the shepherd figure helps Wordsworth prove that the French Revolution was a mere attempt to imitate the natural law which shepherds in particular, and people in close contact with nature in general, have followed since the dawn of time. It is true that the poet treats the theme of the shepherd in Book VIII, which immediately precedes the books dedicated to his account of the French Revolution, but the history of the composition of *The Prelude* shows that Wordsworth did not write Book VIII until after he had written the most part of Books X and XI. Book VIII was composed in October 1804, whereas most of Book IX and a version of Book X were written somewhere between late April 1804 and 'ca. early June (or conceivably at the beginning of October)'.<sup>34</sup> This indicates that the same pattern of departure—and–return is at work here:

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<sup>34</sup> 'Composition and Texts: *The Prelude* of 1805 and 1850', *The Norton Prelude*, pp. 518-19.

Wordsworth went back to the Lake District to draw important lessons from his new experience and the events of the Revolution. The Lake District shepherd was Wordsworth's response to the principles the revolutionists upheld and the ideals they sought to establish in society. I will begin my discussion, therefore, by introducing this highly significant figure before going back to show how it is employed by Wordsworth as a means of illustrating the incidents related to his French experience.

In Book IX Wordsworth explains to Coleridge why he was not as bedazzled by the ideals of the Revolution as he could have been,

O Friend!

If at the first great outbreak I rejoiced  
 Less than might well befit my youth, the cause  
 In part lay here, that unto me the events  
 Seemed nothing out of nature's certain course,  
 A gift that rather was come late than soon.

(IX, 249-54)

Long before the Revolution called for liberty, equality, and justice, Wordsworth had been living these ideals in his day-to-day life. Nature taught the poet to be part of a greater whole he surrenders to, trusts, and feels one with, just as everyone and everything else is also part of it. Feeling that he was part of this oneness with the universe led Wordsworth to love all creation: he was 'taught to love/[his] fellow beings, to such habits trained/Among the woods and mountains' (VIII, 69-71). In fact, natural features such as mountains are mentioned in relation with Wordsworth's love of equality and liberty. The poet tells us that it is no wonder he should be someone who 'look[s] with awe/Upon the faculties of Man,' and 'hail[s]/As best the government of equal rights/And individual worth' (IX, 245-49). He owes these attitudes to 'subservience from the first/To God and Nature's single

sovereignty,/Familiar presences of awful Power ... /And mountain liberty' (IX, 237-42). In addition to these factors, Wordsworth also ascribes his love of freedom and equality to his education at Hawkshead and Cambridge, where 'claims of wealth or blood' were of no significance, and where he and his fellow students 'were brothers all/In honour' (IX, 226, 231-32). Wordsworth, then, was taught from an early age to love all humanity and regard everyone as his equal.

Surrendering to the 'awful Power' of nature, which Wordsworth mentions as one reason for his respect of 'individual worth' and equality amongst people, is a state of being which opens one up to receive nature's power. This is the same state experienced by the people taking part in the Grasmere Fair: they were, at once, as weak as 'tender Infants' yet 'great' because they formed just one element of the greater context which is the impressive natural forms surrounding them in the 'immense [...] recess' they occupied (47-54). This process of opening up to the power of nature and allowing it to flow through one does not take any effort – in fact, once one gives oneself up to nature completely, forgetting one's ego, this unconscious process begins to take place smoothly and fully. Once the self has been given up to this higher power, nature begins to inscribe noble emotions and feelings on the heart. Wordsworth describes this process in terms of how nature, in association with the humble 'ordinary human interests' and cares of those living within her boundaries inspires love in the heart and teaches it to feel and be alive,

The common haunts of the green earth,  
With the ordinary human interests  
Which they embosom, all without regard  
As both may seem, are fastening on the heart  
Insensibly, each with the other's help,  
So that we love, not knowing that we love,

And we feel, not knowing whence our feeling comes.

(VIII, 166-72)

This love inspired by nature is dependent on the condition that the person receiving it ought to be physically close to her, and to share the cares, worries, and interests common to all those whose lives are close to and dependent on nature. Wordsworth had a lot of respect and love for people who live that way, 'My first human love [...] did incline to those/Whose occupations and concerns were most/Illustrated by nature and adorned' (VIII, 178-81). It was shepherds who occupied the most special place in his heart among those people, 'Shepherds were the men who pleased me first,' Wordsworth declares (VIII, 182). In order to illustrate the special status shepherds hold in Wordsworth's thought I am going to employ Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*, which is a significant tool in understanding the concept of oneness in all creation and how the shepherd figure has been able to achieve it. It is through this unity that the shepherd has been able to live the principles and ideals of the French Revolution in his daily life long before they were made the basis for that historic event.

In *The Perennial Philosophy*, which aims at exploring what he maintains is a unity of belief underlying the great world religions, Aldous Huxley says that 'only the pure in heart and poor in spirit can come to the unitive knowledge of God.'<sup>35</sup> Wordsworth believed that he was such a person: he says in an address to nature, 'Twas thy power/That raised the first complacency in me,/And noticeable kindliness of heart' (VIII, 74-76). Only someone like this can uphold principles of true equality, justice, and freedom. The shepherd too is someone who is both humble and 'pure in heart,' and he therefore believes in those same principles instinctively as he has been touched by the power of nature in the same way as Wordsworth, and is able to feel the

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<sup>35</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Triad Grafton, 1985), p. 27.



unity of all creation. This is mostly why the figure of the shepherd in *The Prelude* constitutes Wordsworth's response to the ideals of the French Revolution.

The shepherd is most capable of an intuitive knowledge of God because he combines in his person the three 'ways leading to the delivering union with God' according to Huxley, which are 'the way of works, the way of knowledge and the way of devotion.'<sup>36</sup> The path of devotion means 'devotion to [...] God and universal goodwill and compassion towards all sentient beings.' This is clear, for example, in the story of the shepherd and his son mentioned in Book VIII. The two shepherds go out in freezing weather conditions to look for one sheep which had gone astray the day before, risking their own lives in the process. The second path to God is that of works, which entails 'work[ing] without regard to the fruits of work, in a state of complete non-attachment to self.' This, again, is a trait the shepherd enjoys: people who herd sheep are not usually preoccupied with making a profit. In Cumbria, for instance, Wordsworth states that the shepherd is 'Intent on little but substantial needs' (VIII, 10). Shepherds, moreover, do not look after sheep in order to improve their societal status. The Lake District shepherd was contented with his lot in life, and accepted his place as a member of society who is equal to others. He was 'a Man/With the most common; Husband, Father [...] suffered with the rest/From vice and folly, wretchedness and fear' (VIII, 423-26)

According to Huxley, the third way to God is the way of knowledge 'through the modification of consciousness, until it ceases to be ego-centred and becomes centred in and united with the divine Ground.'<sup>37</sup> As I have previously shown, the shepherd is someone who has completely opened himself up to universal power by subduing and surrendering the ego to it. In return, the shepherd becomes someone to

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>37</sup> Huxley, p. 195.

whom 'the sanctity of nature' is 'given,' and whom Wordsworth describes as being 'purified' (VIII, 430, 439). This comprehensive explanation and break down of the paths to God may account for the high regard Wordsworth holds shepherds in. They are 'spiritual almost/As those of Books; but more exalted far,/Far more of an imaginative form' (VIII, 417-19). This respect Wordsworth has for shepherds manifests itself especially in the spiritual way they are depicted in the poem.

Wordsworth's abstract portrayal of shepherds in *The Prelude* makes it clear that they stood for certain concepts which were more important for his theme than the shepherd's individual characteristics, similarities and differences. As it appears in the poem, the figure of the shepherd is always described in general terms, with no details given as to his name, age, clothing, and the like. He is simply 'a Shepherd and his Dog!' appearing 'in open day' (VIII, 95), or 'a Shepherd in the bottom of a Vale/Towards the centre standing' (VIII, 105-06). It is usually the background against which the shepherd is seen that is recorded. Thus, for example, Wordsworth painstakingly describes the circumstances of his meeting with a shepherd on a foggy day, without giving much detail about the man himself. To introduce the encounter, Wordsworth first speaks at length about the weather conditions and the 'mists and steam-like fogs/Redounding everywhere, not vehement,/But calm and mild, gentle and beautiful,/With gleams of sunshine' (VIII, 84-88). The poet then turns to the moment he saw the man and his dog,

Girt round with mists they stood and looked about  
 From that enclosure small, inhabitants  
 Of an aerial Island floating on,  
 As seemed, with that Abode in which they were,  
 A little pendant area of grey rocks,  
 By the soft wind breathed forward.

## (VIII, 96–101)

This detailed description of the shepherd's surroundings is significant: it shows 'the isolation of one element from the other,' as Herbert Lindenberger points out.<sup>38</sup> This isolation is demonstrated through the use of certain images, such as that of the island in the foregoing quote. The island serves as a means of cutting the shepherd and his dog off from 'the solid world,' thus allowing them to 'gather a visionary aura about themselves.' Once they have been separated from the real world, it is possible to 'connect [these two figures] later at a deeper level.' When Wordsworth sees a shepherd as a 'giant,' and 'his sheep like Greenland Bears,' the same principle is at work too: there is fog or rain which prepares the poet to see his objects 'in a unique visual perspective,' which itself 'creates the transition by which we are enabled to view the shepherd as a spiritual manifestation' (VIII, 401-02).

The poem often portrays the shepherd as a mystic who enjoys deep interaction with nature. As a result of this interaction, he almost transcends his human qualities and assumes some of the qualities of the force he is one with. The shepherd and his dog are, for example, 'floating' with the 'aerial Island' they inhabit, which 'the soft wind breathed forward' (VIII, 97-101). At another time the shepherd appears magnified in size, 'a Giant,' walking in the fog, his herd appearing as big as polar bears at his side (VIII, 400).<sup>39</sup> Or, more strikingly, the shepherd appears to Wordsworth,

In distant sky,

A solitary object and sublime,

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<sup>38</sup> Herbert Lindenberger, 'The Rhetoric of Interaction (2): Images of Interaction', in *On Wordsworth's "Prelude"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 69-98 (82-83).

<sup>39</sup> The idea that a shepherd seen through fog would look like a giant comes from lines in *The Seasons* (1746), by James Thomson (1700-48), a native of the Scottish Border. His passage describing 'copious exhalations' and 'fogs' in Autumn adds 'Indistinct on earth,/Seen through the turbid air [...]The shepherd stalks gigantic.' (James Thomson, '*The Seasons*' and '*The Castle of Indolence*', ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 108, lines 724-27).

Above all height! Like an aerial Cross,  
 As it is stationed on some spiry Rock  
 Of the Chartreuse, for worship.

(VIII, 406-10)

The shepherd is depicted here as a symbol of faith. He is a cross around which sheep flock in search of protection, a beacon which guides lost sheep to the right path. Like the cross emerging from a rock of the Chartreuse, the shepherd is both well grounded in his mountainous environment, and looks up to heaven in a constant communion with it. Indeed Wordsworth portrays the shepherd as a God-like figure who the poet observed as a little boy 'in his own domain,' with a 'presence' like that 'of a Lord and Master; [...] under Nature, under God,/Presiding; and severest solitude/Seemed more commanding oft when he was there' (VIII, 392-96). Like a deity, the shepherd is responsible for his sheep, and has sympathy for them; he provides them with protection, food and shelter. The sheep in return trust him, look up to him, and follow his guidance. This is also true of the people who know the shepherd and consider him a source of security and strength. The Matron's Tale tells how, when the shepherd's son is stranded on a small island in the middle of the river, he is too frightened to jump back to the shore, and stays there for a long time. When the father finds him, all he does is 'stretch [...] his Staff/towards him, [bid] him leap.' Within seconds, the son is reunited with his father (VIII, 309-11). By extension, Wordsworth, like the shepherd's son in the Matron's Tale, could also be seen as a boy led to safety and the warmth of love and belief by the shepherd,

But blessed be the God  
 Of Nature and of Man that this was so,  
 That Men did at the first present themselves  
 Before my untaught eyes thus purified,

Removed, and at a distance that was fit.  
 And so we all of us in some degree  
 Are led to knowledge.

(VIII, 436-42)

The shepherd, then, was one of Wordsworth's early teachers, and *The Prelude* attempts to show how the poet came to realize that this figure, at once instinctive and primitive, combines in his person all the elements necessary for the constitution of a peaceful society where everyone is truly equal, and where change comes from within rather than without.

While staying in Blois, Wordsworth met a 'knot of Military Officers,/That to a Regiment appertained which then/Was stationed in the City' (IX, 127-29). Although the poet says that these officers were 'the chief/of his associates' during his stay in the French city, he only describes one of them in some detail, in addition to his friend, Michael Beaupuy (VIII, 129-30). The account Wordsworth gives of the unnamed officer appears to be in contrast to the figure of the Lake District shepherd. Unlike the shepherd, who is, as already noted, 'Lord and Master,' reigning supreme 'in his own domain' of solitary hills and vast pastures (VIII, 392-93), the officer used to be a 'Lord' of a different type: 'he had sate Lord in many tender hearts,' Wordsworth points out (IX, 145). The Lake District shepherd, moreover, who mostly appears to Wordsworth to be in full harmony with himself and his surroundings, is depicted as being a majestic figure, always very calm and composed. When the shepherd is around, even solitude appears 'more commanding' (VIII, 395-96). The officer, by way of contrast, is completely out of harmony with his surroundings, and has no internal peace. He has a temper which is 'quite mastered by the times/And they had blighted him' (IX, 147-48). His body 'which once had been erect and open,' was now 'stooping and contracted,' and his face 'expressed [...] a ravage out of reason' (IX,

150-56). The shepherd in the Matron's Tale exhibits exemplary composure when his son does not come back home in the evening, and acts very quickly when he finally finds the boy stranded on an island in the middle of the raging river, saving his life with no hesitation. Unlike the shepherd, the officer suffers from fits of fever which affect him when 'the public News was read' every day (IX, 158). The fever '[shook] this Man,/Disarmed his voice, and fanned his yellow cheek/into a thousand colours' (IX, 159-61). The officer's sword was very important to him, and he nervously checked it every now and then: whenever he 'read,/Or mused, his sword was haunted by his touch/Continually' (IX, 161-63). The shepherd's staff is as important for him as the sword is for the officer. Shepherds always keep their staffs by their sides just like a sword, and often use them during their work. The difference between the two devices, however, could not be bigger: the sword has probably been used by the officer to kill others in battle, 'some of these [Officers] wore Swords/Which had been seasoned in the Wars' (IX, 130-31), whereas the shepherd's staff is a life-giving tool as depicted in the Matron's Tale: when the shepherd reached the river, he 'stretched his Staff/Towards [his son], bade him leap, which word scarce said/The Boy was saved within his Father's arms' (VIII, 309-11). Shepherds also use their staffs in herding sheep: a shepherd would go up the hills 'fast with his long Pole in hand' in order to follow his flock around and make sure they are safe and well fed (VIII, 382).

The French Revolution called for harmony in society, oneness and equality among all people regardless of their class or social or economic background. The events of the Revolution, however, especially with the violent turn the events which started taking place in 1793, proved that something must have stopped these idealistic principles from being properly applied on the ground. Huxley gives a significant insight into this, arguing that 'the attempt to impose more unity upon societies than

their individual members are ready for makes it psychologically almost impossible for those individuals to realize their unity with the divine Ground and with one another.<sup>40</sup> Having lived under oppression, injustice and inequality for so long, the French people may not have been ready for such a momentous shift in consciousness, which ultimately rendered any effort to bring about oneness with one another and with God – both vital for a true harmonious existence – futile. The ‘genuine religion of unity,’ according to Huxley, is achievable ‘on the personal and spiritual levels,’ not politically, as political unity is merely a ‘cult,’ ‘an idolatrous ersatz for’ the authentic ‘religion.’<sup>41</sup> This is substantiated in France by the emergence of Robespierre and Napoleon, two leaders under whose rule there was ‘discontent at home and war abroad,’ and who could bring no true freedom, justice, or equality to the people.<sup>42</sup>

To counter these wrong implementations of the concept of unity Wordsworth presents the Lake District shepherd as someone who instinctively lives in a state of personal and spiritual oneness with his surroundings. He is one with the ‘soft wind’ from which he emerges in an act reminiscent of birth. The shepherd is being ‘breathed [...] forward’ by the fog, and enjoys a state of unison with the ‘deep radiance of the setting sun’ which ‘glorified’ his figure, thus making it look huge to Wordsworth (VIII, 101, 404-05). This makes the shepherd less of an individual and more a part of a whole. Whereas the Revolution adopted rights for individuals – thus probably reinforcing the notion of individual separateness among people – the shepherd wanted very little for himself. The law of nature operating all around the shepherd is one of equality and justice. It is the law which provides for all creatures equally and treats them with fairness. By living close with nature the shepherd is able to directly experience this universal law and live by it. This direct experience contrasts with the

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<sup>40</sup> Huxley, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

primarily indirect way the French people experienced the principles of the Revolution. It was through an ideology that they were to learn to live the ideals of their Revolution, which can only result in a distorted form of democracy.

Evidence abounds in *The Prelude* that the shepherd was far ahead of the French Revolution when it comes to the implementation of certain ideals in everyday life. The Revolution, for example, called for freedom; the shepherd was already ‘in those vast regions where his service is/A Freeman’ (VIII, 326-27). Under the feudal system which operated in France at the time of the calls for reform, people were forced to work long hours in return for a measly pay. They had little say in what type of work to do, and the work they did was, regardless of its nature, mainly designed to serve the feudal master and help increase his wealth and status. It was not in order to provide the poor workers and their families with the minimal necessities that they were forced to work in mostly inhumane conditions. In the Lake District, however, Wordsworth recounts how the situation is quite different: man there was

free, man working for himself, with choice  
Of time, and place, and object; by his wants,  
His comforts, native occupations, cares,  
Conducted on to individual ends  
Or social.

(VIII, 152-56)

The individual and social goals the shepherd works for arise out of free choice. Like the shepherd’s care for his sheep, those goals represent an execution of this choice within a harmonious relationship with nature. Wordsworth mentions at the beginning of the above passage that man and nature are akin to each other: the human heart echoes in its workings the ‘sun and the sky,/the elements and seasons in their change’ thus becoming ‘their dearest Fellow-labourer’ (VIII, 147-50). When one’s ‘fellow-



labourers' are the sun and heavens, from which one derives the rhythm and passion to continue working, that is true freedom and equality in one's being and everything around one.

Wordsworth notes that nature has a code of practice, as it were, stipulating that hard work is rewarded. This is why shepherds, poor people as they are, would never starve to death. They would always find enough means to sustain themselves and their families. This is in sharp contrast with the girl Wordsworth saw knitting on the road while walking with Beaupuy. She was a shepherd-like figure: she 'crept along, fitting her languid self/Unto a Heifer's motion, by a cord/Tied to her arm' (IX, 512-15).

Contrary to what the case is with shepherds who can always find something to eat off the land, the girl was 'hunger-bitten.' Beaupuy remarks angrily that this is a result of the law of the land not being allowed to operate. When natural law is not followed, scenes like this become common. Revolutionists, according to Beaupuy, were fighting so 'that we should see the earth/Unthwarted in her wish to recompense/The industrious, and the lowly Child of Toil' (IX, 524-26). France, then, has been far behind the Lake District in this respect because it has relegated the sacred codes of the land into a secondary position and allowed unnatural laws to take over, thus necessitating the outbreak of a revolution to put things right and bring them back to a state of harmony with nature.

One of the most important goals of the Revolution was the abolition of the absolute power of the monarch. Wordsworth too was opposed to this type of totalitarian government, recalling how he used to talk with Beaupuy over 'the miseries/Of royal Courts [...] where the Man who is of soul/The meanest thrives the most' (IX, 353-55). But it was not only that the worst people seem to have been in

charge of the country; it was, Wordsworth writes, the notions of supreme power and privilege he was most against,

Hatred of absolute rule, where will of One  
Is law for all, and of that barren pride  
In them who, by immunities unjust,  
Betwixt the Sovereign and the People stand,  
His helper and not theirs.

(IX, 504-08)

The idea of a monarch ruling his people with the help of some powerful assistants is reminiscent of the shepherd Wordsworth saw in the bottom of a valley. The shepherd was training his dog to ‘chase along the mazes of steep crags/The flock he could not see’ (VIII, 109-10). Similar to the ruler who is incapable of seeing the people because his assistants stood between them, the shepherd too cannot see his sheep because of the rocks and hills he operates within. The shepherd cares for the sheep he cannot see. He trains his dog to guard them and show them the way to food and safety. The absolute ruler, perhaps, does not care as much about his people, and allows his assistants to abuse them. These officials resemble the dog which helps the shepherd: both are used to control flocks. The monarch’s men – chiefly corrupt aristocrats who have been appointed to the role for reasons relating to privilege and birth not individual worth – use their position to reinforce the ruler’s power, oppress the people, and enhance their own position. Oppression to them is the only method by which they could keep the regime in power. They neither trust the people, nor are themselves trusted by the people. The shepherd’s helper is, nevertheless, of a very different type. He is chosen out of a specific breed that is not privileged due to pedigree, but because it is best suited to serve both shepherd and sheep well. He is very intelligent, and, although he uses his fearsome bark to keep the sheep under

control, he only does this to protect them, not for any personal gain (VIII, 111). The sheep in turn realize this and trust the dog, and, by extension, the shepherd himself. This mutual respect is lost between the ruler and his people, as he believes he needs to oppress them and prohibit any expression of individuality in order to protect and enhance his power. Sheep are allowed to follow the path they choose themselves to reach their pastures: when the warm weather comes, the shepherd's 'office leads/To range among [the Flock], through the hills dispersed,/And watch their goings, whatsoever track/Each Wanderer chuses for itself' (VIII, 371-74). Such freedom is denied people living under an absolute totalitarian ruler.

The Lake District has, then, proven to be the source of Wordsworth's final truth once more through a thorough examination and comparison between the ideals upheld by the French Revolution and the figure of the Lake District Shepherd. The poet has chosen to go back in spirit and draw on his experiences in his native region to seek meaning behind the French Revolution and his own changed attitude toward this phenomenal event.

### **The Snowdon Ascent and Wordsworth's Zenith of Consciousness**

Wordsworth's spiritual journey culminates on Snowdon.<sup>43</sup> This is reflected in the fact that the account of the ascent is placed in the last book of *The Prelude* even though this arrangement is not chronologically accurate. The ascent took place in 1791, when Wordsworth was twenty one. According to the order of events in *The Prelude*, however, the mountain adventure takes place after the trauma the poet experienced in the wake of his disillusionment with the French Revolution. This intentional reordering of events so that the poem has gone back full circle to nature is

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<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that Snowdon is in Wales, not the Lake District, despite the fact that Wordsworth's description of it gives it a Lake District character. This is reminiscent of 'Tintern Abbey' carrying Lake District overtones although it is set in the Wye Valley.

thematically significant: it not only showcases Wordsworth's graduation from the world of appearances and false realities necessary for an understanding of his experience on the mountain; it also demonstrates that nature has once more been instrumental in guiding the poet to the truth he has always sought out in his life experiences, gently showing him where the meaning of such experiences lies and how they could be utilized to achieve self-understanding and growth.

When the ideals of the French Revolution, which Wordsworth was very enthusiastic for, could not stand the temptation of power and wealth, and men whom he held in high esteem started falling victim to greed and the temptation of power and fame, the poet went through a traumatic period in his life where he lost faith in almost everything. This was a very dark phase in Wordsworth's life, and it was his return to live in nature, represented by Grasmere, as well as the help and support of Dorothy and Coleridge, that helped him gain back his balance and belief in human goodness and begin to see once again 'on all sides day [beginning] to appear' (XII, 22).

Wordsworth's relationship with his fellow human beings changed after this ordeal: nature brought back his 'wiser mood' which used to see 'little worthy or sublime/In what we blazon with the pompous names/Of power and action' (XII, 45-49). He now started to go beyond the blinding outward show which often dazzles the eyes, looking for 'what would last/And what would disappear' (XII, 69-70). Only then could he regard 'in Man an object of delight,/Of pure imagination, and of love' (XII, 54-55). It was in Grasmere that he 'heard,/From mouths of lowly men and of obscure/A tale of honour; sounds in unison/With loftiest promises of good and fair' (XII, 181-82). This was true honour, completely divorced from associations with worldly notions such as social status, wealth, or power. It was, more importantly, an honour derived from nature, from a close connection with the earth, from a place

those people were privileged to live in, which led them on to discover the ties they had with humanity at large, not just within their own small community.

Wordsworth's disillusionment with such facades, and his newly restored faith in the 'unison' found underneath deceptive appearances, prepared him for his all-important revelation on Snowdon, in which he came face to face with the 'Soul, the Imagination of the whole' – the underlying unity which he had felt very often in his life, but had never come face to face with before (XIII, 65). When he reaches the summit, 'the foremost of [his] Band,' Wordsworth finds himself 'on the shore [...] of a huge sea of mist' (XIII, 42-43). This mist covers the entire place, making it very difficult to see the place, while simultaneously fusing everyone and everything together into a single entity. The mist 'rested at my feet,' Wordsworth records, repeating a few lines later, 'we stood, the mist/Touching our very feet' (XIII, 44, 53-54). This repetition is perhaps intended by Wordsworth to stress the fact that the mist has both served to connect him with his companions and the landscape which was made into one unit by the vapours covering everywhere, while also preventing him from seeing things clearly, including his own body. The mist has transformed the whole scene, creating a 'still Ocean' of light on the ground which has been solid a little while before (46). This ocean made 'the Sea, the real Sea [...] dwindle and give up its majesty,/Usurped upon as far as sight could reach' (XIII, 49-51). Everything as Wordsworth has known it changed at that moment and was taken over by the mist: his body, the sea, the hills whose 'dusky backs upheaved/All over this still Ocean' (XIII, 45-46). Wordsworth was now detached from everything the way he has always perceived it: forms were altered and boundaries blurred. Once this duality in the way the self is viewed as separate from its surroundings is dropped, Wordsworth becomes capable of connecting with the soul that lies underneath everything in nature, hidden

from ordinary human perception by the separation between the I and the other. It is only at this moment that Wordsworth views

A blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour,  
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which  
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams  
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.  
[...]

In that breach  
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,  
That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged  
The Soul, the Imagination of the whole.

(XIII, 56-65)

Different readers interpret this passage differently. For example, Abrams's reading of draws on Hegelian philosophy, looking at the growth of the human mind as a 'circuitous journey' which is echoed in the pattern of circular movement this chapter depicts. Abrams contends that Wordsworth 'finally discovers [...] not just the sublimity of nature' – which he was perhaps already aware of - nor 'the deepest truth of his own consciousness':<sup>44</sup> he realised the 'interdependence between the two'. In other words, he realised that 'his mind confronts nature only to find there the reflection of its own powers'.<sup>45</sup> Not all critics, however, see this experience as a conscious realization of the poet's own divinity. Nigel Wood, for example, argues instead that the emergence of the new 'sense of God' experienced at such moments as the Snowdon ascent is not one of a few 'privileged occasions of awareness' experienced by Wordsworth several times. The experience has not been 'synthetized and memorialized by a commanding consciousness' as Abrams suggests: it rather

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<sup>44</sup> Milnes, p. 69.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

constitutes 'displaced eruptions of the unconscious, transferred in their significance into a "sense of God", the sublime, or "spots of time"'. This emergence of the 'sense of God' is the direct result of the poet's 'listening to the new grammar or language of the unconscious'.<sup>46</sup> Wordsworth's 'meditation' which followed his experience on the summit is in fact an attempt of his mind to rearrange past experience in an attempt to understand his own life and 'keep at bay the threat of his own mortality by making something coherent out of the scattered fragments of the past'.<sup>47</sup> Once those past episodes are allowed to emerge from the unconscious to the conscious mind, thus allowing them to be 'faced' directly by the poet, the 'perfect image of a mighty mind' – that of God – appears.<sup>48</sup> Wood's reading seems to be at odds with Wordsworth's exultation at the end of his Snowdon experience due to the fact that he has now been led to connect directly with the mind of God.

Wood denies Wordsworth the possibility of actually having come into contact with that 'mighty mind' by asserting that the 'sense of God' the poet experienced was no more than a mental construct arising from unconscious images worked upon by the mind. Necessary for overcoming one's fear of death, this process described by Wood seems to be based in fear rather than love, which is what an experience of coming face to face with God in nature, and within the human mind and soul, signifies.

Wood's interpretation of the Snowdon Experience is refuted by this thesis on two grounds, both of which are based on the incorrect nature of the assumption of the existence of the unconscious. First, Wood's assertion that the experience of the mind of God atop Snowdon results from a new grammar or language of the unconscious assumes a dogmatic interpretative framework that would not even allow for the liberation of grammar and language into a rearrangement of past experience. This

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp. 97-98.

interpretation that Wood brings to the Snowdon Experience would take the shape of a mediating interpretation of meaning that would stand in the way and not allow for the liberating experience Wood describes. Wood's interpretation is grounded in the false assumption of the unconscious that true liberation, happiness, or transcendence is unattainable. This is due to the inescapable nature of the repressed contents of the unconscious – made up of sexual and other dark urges – which means that we fearfully and aggressively use others for our enjoyment and gain. Simply uncovering these assumed contents of the unconscious will only result in a recycling of the dark urges lurking in the psyche, which, in any event, there is no proof that they exist. Wood's interpretation of the Snowdon Experience is particularly erroneous when considering the line of thought of this thesis, which asserts that Wordsworth's unique individual imagination is able to distance itself from natural forms in a manner that allows him to reconfigure external reality as a transcendent vision fusing content and form, word and idea, the individual and nature. Wordsworth describes the Snowdon Experience as a process within the imagination much more radical than simply the uncovering and purging of dark unconscious desires. The limitations of Wood's theory lie in the fact that it represents little more than a cathartic experience brought about by watching a tragedy.

Wordsworth has been able to perceive of the mind of God on the summit of Mount Snowdon. His experience, he realized, having had the 'meditation' afterwards, was indeed one of coming face to face with 'The perfect image of a mighty Mind,/Of one that feeds upon infinity' (XIII, 69-70). The faculty in Wordsworth which perceived God is, of course, the imagination, which is both 'Willing to work and to be wrought upon' by nature when in a state of surrender to her power (XIII, 99-100). Such strong imaginative power is a trait of 'higher minds' which are 'more fit/To hold



communion with the invisible world' (XIII, 104-05). Higher minds both create and receive the reality around them,<sup>49</sup> 'They from their native selves can send abroad/Like transformation, for themselves create/A like existence, and, when'er it is/Created for them, catch it by an instinct' (XIII, 93-96). Minds like those are especially attuned to seeing into the essence of what lies around: they are 'Powers; and hence the highest bliss/That can be known is theirs, the consciousness/Of whom they are' (XIII, 107-09). Knowing who one really is, or, in other words, seeing the divine element in man, is considered by Wordsworth to be the highest form of bliss one can ever experience, as such knowledge means that one has finally realized one's purpose in life. Higher minds, Wordsworth asserts, 'are truly from the Deity,' and their relationship with God is epitomized by the image of the chasm on the mountain summit (XIII, 106). This means that Wordsworth has realised his own divine essence and fully connected with it for the first time. During the experience on the mountain there were 'Waters, torrents, and streams' running through the rift, 'roaring with one voice,' while the vapour covering the mountain descended upon them and took part in the loud natural music they made (XIII, 59-60). Although the elements meeting in the chasm, in the 'Soul' of nature, were united at that moment and all contributed to the music of nature, they are each different, and have been brought together by the realization that one soul permeates them all, and that they can only tap into it when their forms and the boundaries between them are no longer intact. This is echoed in the way Wordsworth's own experience of this all-permeating Soul is depicted in the poem. Everything in nature experiences this Soul when the individual self is transcended and the connection with all creation is realised.

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<sup>49</sup> The Norton *Prelude*, notes to p. 462.

The revelation Wordsworth had on the summit of Mount Snowdon is the culmination of his life journey as portrayed in *The Prelude*. The poet's journey of growth and self-discovery has come to an end as contact with reality took on a more direct form now, and the 'passion' with which nature used to inscribe her sublime and beautiful forms on Wordsworth's mind in an outward fashion has now become intrinsic, reaching the 'freedom of the greater not-nature,' as Geoffrey Hartman puts it.<sup>50</sup>

The fact that the poet has chosen to end his autobiography in a spot of nature is proof that he has once more chosen to employ nature as a measure of truth. Having been to so many places, Wordsworth is back in nature seeking her wisdom and guidance in finding meaning and growth in the time he spent and the experiences he had had away from her.

### **Scott, Autobiography, and Nature**

In contrast to Wordsworth, nature to Scott was not a source of truth, a guide to understanding the self, and a force with which he felt connected and in unison. Nature was rather more of a background for his activities, something outside of him which he would have a walk in, paint, and use to provide a backdrop for his writings, conveying certain meanings through the employment of various natural features. While Wordsworth does not employ nature in a certain manner in his life or poetry, Scott's writings demonstrate that the way the two authors regarded nature in a specific geographical area was not the same, as I have already pointed out in the Introduction. The following section aims at introducing Scott's autobiographical writings and

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<sup>50</sup> *William Wordsworth's The Prelude: A Casebook*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 27 (Introduction).

briefly contrasting them with Wordsworth's *The Prelude* before discussing the way nature at a specific locale – the Scottish Border – is featured in them.

Scott never wrote anything like *The Prelude*, which was a work he never saw. He was, however an autobiographer best known for writing about his own life in prose. His most celebrated autobiographical work is his *Journal*, kept between 1825 and shortly before his death in 1832. It covers his financial crash in 1826 and the difficult years following it in which, in increasing ill health, he wrote to pay off the debt incurred in happier times by his publisher and printer and Scott himself. This work is outside the time-span of this thesis. More relevant are the autobiographical passages which Scott wrote earlier in his life, in both prose and poetry.

Scott's first autobiographical attempt is called simply *Memoirs*, and is dated 'Ashestiel 26<sup>th</sup> April 1808'.<sup>51</sup> Its editor, David Hewitt, points out that the manuscript was written in 1808 and *circa* 1810-11, with some revisions and additions made in 1826.<sup>52</sup> Scott did not expect his *Memoirs* to be read in his lifetime,<sup>53</sup> and the manuscript was first published when it formed the opening chapter of J. G. Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 7 vols (Edinburgh, 1837-38), Vol. I, pp. [1]-60. These short *Memoirs* tell the story of Scott's life from early childhood to 1792, the year in which he completed his education and was admitted to the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh.

In autobiographical writings the dates of starting and ending are significant, both the dates within the autobiography itself and the dates of writing. Within the *Memoirs* Scott ends at the point when he is qualified to follow his father into the profession of the law, in his case as an advocate. Wordsworth in *The Prelude* also

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<sup>51</sup> *Scott on Himself*, pp. 1-44. Ashestiel was the house near Selkirk where Scott lived between 1804 and 1812 when he moved to Abbotsford.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 5.

starts chronologically in his early childhood, and ends when he and Dorothy make a home in Grasmere in 1799. Scott was already working as a lawyer when he started writing his life story, and he was also a celebrated poet, having just published his second verse romance, *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*.<sup>54</sup> The contrast with Wordsworth here is considerable: Wordsworth had not embarked on any profession for which his Cambridge education would have prepared him, and, although he had published poetry which is now regarded very highly before he finished the 1805 *Prelude*, he had not gained any particular reward or reputation. The emphasis in the opening of *The Prelude* is on the great work which he hopes to write in the future. Scott, characteristically, says nothing about any future writing.

Wordsworth says very little about his parents and his family in *The Prelude*, and when he does, it is only in relation to his development. Scott, on the other hand, moves quickly to a genealogy of his family in his *Memoirs*, starting with his great-grandfather. He makes some apology for this when he writes, 'Every Scottishman has a pedigree. It is a national prerogative as inalienable as his pride and his poverty.'<sup>55</sup> Scott's family and his education are major themes in the *Memoirs*, and intertwined with them is the story of his love of nature and the Scottish Border. Scott was born in Edinburgh, and at eighteen months old contracted what is now diagnosed as poliomyelitis which caused him to lose the use of his right leg. After the available medical treatments had produced no improvement, he was 'sent to reside in the country to give the chance of natural exertion, excited by free air and liberty'.<sup>56</sup> He went to his paternal grandparents at Sandyknowe farm in Roxburghshire. There his health improved; he describes himself as he approached four years old:

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<sup>54</sup> *Marmion* was published on 22 February 1808, two months before Scott started his *Memoirs*. (William B. Todd and Ann Bowden, *Sir Walter Scott: A Bibliographical History 1796–1832* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press), p. 87).

<sup>55</sup> *Scott on Himself*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

My health was by this time a good deal confirmed by the country air, and the influence of that imperceptible and unfatiguing exercise to which the good sense of my grandfather had subjected me. For when the day was fine I was usually carried out and laid down beside the old shepherd, among the crags or rocks round which he fed his sheep. The impatience of a child soon inclined me to struggle with my infirmity and I began by degrees to stand, to walk, and to run although the limb affected was much shrunk and contracted.<sup>57</sup>

*Marmion* also contains a memory of Scott's early years at Sandyknowe. The poem, which is not set in the Borders, is in six cantos each of which has an introductory verse epistle addressed to a friend. All the Introductions are strongly autobiographical. That to Canto III is addressed to Scott's friend William Erskine, and its themes are poetry and nature. Erskine had criticized Scott's choice of topic for *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and urged him to write within respected literary traditions: 'choose honour'd guide and practis'd road;/Nor ramble on through brake and maze,/With harpers rude of barbarous days.'<sup>58</sup> Erskine goes on to say that if he wants to write about heroic action Scott should celebrate contemporary heroes of the Napoleonic wars. Scott's reply is to ask Erskine whether he had taken into consideration the mysterious power of one's early experiences, whose origin he questions:

Whether an impulse, that has birth  
 Soon as the infant wakes on earth,  
 One with our feelings and our powers,  
 And rather part of us than ours;  
 Or whether fitlier term'd the sway  
 Of habit, form'd in early day?

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>58</sup> *Scott: Poetical Works*, ed. by J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), p. 113, col. 1.

Howe' er deriv'd, its force confest  
 Rules with despotic sway the breast,  
 And drags us on by viewless chain,  
 While taste and reason plead in vain.<sup>59</sup>

That, Scott explains, is why in his poetry 'feelings, rous' d in life's first day,/Glow in the line, and prompt the lay' (p. 114, col. 2). He continues with a passage about his childhood memory of Sandyknowe. Near the farm was the ruin of Smailholm Tower, a fifteenth-century defensive tower house which had belonged to Scott's forbears.

Yet was poetic impulse given,  
 By the green hill and clear blue heaven.  
 It was a barren scene, and wild,  
 Where naked cliffs were rudely pil'd;  
 But ever and anon between  
 Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;  
 And well the lonely infant knew  
 Recesses where the wall-flower grew,  
 And honey-suckle lov'd to crawl  
 Up the low crag and ruin'd wall.  
 I deem' d such nooks the sweetest shade  
 The sun in all its round survey'd;  
 And still I thought that shatter'd tower  
 The mightiest work of human power;  
 And marvell' d as the aged hind  
 With some strange tale bewitch'd my mind,  
 Of forayers, who, with headlong force,  
 Down from that strength had spurr'd their horse,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 114, col. 1.

Their southern rapine to renew,  
Far in the distant Cheviots blue.<sup>60</sup>

This is a wilder landscape than any in Wordsworth, with history imprinted on it. It shares with his poetry, however, reference to distant higher mountains – in this case the Cheviot hills, on the Anglo-Scottish Border.

In 1778, at the age of seven, Scott was summoned back to his parents' house in Edinburgh in the interests of his education. The following year he started at the High School of Edinburgh, from which he proceeded to Edinburgh University. During those years he visited his family in the Borders in holidays and for convalescence after bouts of illness. A significant visit was in 1783, when he was twelve, and was sent there for six months to recover from illness.<sup>61</sup> By this time both his grandparents had died and he stayed with his Aunt Janet, who had moved to a house on the river Tweed near Kelso. In the garden of that house was the platanus tree under which he first read Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.<sup>62</sup>

It was during this stay near Kelso that Scott first became conscious of his response to nature and place. In his *Memoirs* he writes:

To this period also I can trace distinctly the awaking of that delightful feeling for the beauties of natural objects which has never since deserted me. The neighbourhood of Kelso, the most beautiful if not the most romantic village in Scotland, is eminently calculated to awaken these ideas. It presents objects not only grand in themselves but venerable from their association. The meeting of two superb rivers, the Tweed and the Teviot, both renowned in song, the ruins of an ancient abbey, the more distant vestiges of Roxburgh Castle, the modem mansion of Fleurs which is so situated as to combine the ideas of ancient baronial grandeur with those of modem taste are in

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 114, col. 5-115, col. 1.

<sup>61</sup> John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 24.

<sup>62</sup> *Scott on Himself*, p. 28.

themselves objects of the first class yet are so mixed, united and melted among a thousand other beauties of a less prominent description that they harmonize into one general picture and please rather by unison than by concord. I believe I have written unintelligibly upon this subject but it is fitter for the pencil than the pen. The romantic feelings which I have described as predominating in my mind naturally rested upon and associated themselves with these grand features of the landscape around me and the historical incidents or the traditional legends connected with many of them, gave to my admiration a sort of intense impression of reverence, which at times made my heart feel too big for its bosom. From this time my love of natural beauty more especially when combined with ancient ruins or remains of our fathers' piety or splendour, became with me an insatiable passion.<sup>63</sup>

Scott describes his love for nature at that early time of his life as involving romantic feelings aroused by its beauty and grandeur, and particularly so when enhanced by the presence of 'ruins or remains' which recall ideas from history or tradition. Also he tends to see nature and the ruins in it pictorially. In these respects his response to nature is considerably different from Wordsworth's. Wordsworth does not tend to think pictorially in viewing nature. Although Scott admits to a 'sort of intense impression of reverence', he does not make anything like Wordsworth's spiritual claims for nature. To him, nature is formed of 'objects' which are separate from him, not connected together and to him as Wordsworth held. The most interesting comparison is between the two poets on the subject of history. Wordsworth writes in Book VIII of *The Prelude*:

'Tis true the History of my native Land  
 [ ... ]  
 Had never much delighted me. And less  
 Than other minds I had been used to owe

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 28–29.



The pleasure which I found in place or thing  
 To extrinsic transitory accidents,  
 To records or traditions; but a sense  
 Of what had been here done, and suffered here  
 Through ages, and was doing, suffering, still,  
 Weighed with me,  
 [ ... ]

and not seldom

Even individual remembrances,  
 By working on the Shapes before my eyes,  
 Became like vital functions of the soul;  
 And out of what had been, what was, the place  
 Was thronged with impregnations, like those wilds  
 In which my early feelings had been nursed,  
 And naked valleys, full of caverns, rocks,  
 And audible seclusions, dashing lakes,  
 Echoes and Waterfalls, and pointed crags  
 That into music touch the passing wind.<sup>64</sup>

Wordsworth shares none of Scott's enthusiasm for the history or tradition associated with places; but the two poets are more alike than they might seem in that such places prompt for both of them awareness of suffering endured down the ages, and they both link their response to such places with their response to nature.

It is clear from the autobiographies of the two writers that they both revered nature and appreciated her beauty, but that it did not carry the same meaning for them. As will become clearer in the following chapter, Scott saw nature as represented by the Scottish Border as an outside phenomenon with which he had no link other than

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<sup>64</sup> *The Prelude*, Book VIII, lines 770, 777–84, 786–96.

an aesthetic one. Nature to him was a place of beauty where his senses experienced pleasure and appreciated beautiful objects to be used for various purposes. Nature to Wordsworth was a haven he returned to whenever life led him away from her, a measure and a guide he used in order to find the truth whenever he needed guidance after a new life experience.

## Chapter 3

### Nature and Place in Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*

This chapter discusses the way nature in a specific locale, i.e. the Anglo-Scottish Borders, is used in Scott's poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* as a lens through which the traditions and customs of a time gone by can be examined and later used to create a better future. An assumption which has already been pointed out in the Introduction will also be investigated in this chapter, namely, that Scott viewed nature as a force which resides without, rather than within, the self -- a mere background for his writings, and a force more aligned with the collective history and tradition of the Borders region than the inner workings of the souls of its inhabitants, who are rather viewed as conveyors of Border customs and traditions.

#### Introduction to *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*

On the morning of William and Dorothy's first meeting with Scott during their 1803 Scottish tour, Scott 'partly read and partly recited, sometimes in an enthusiastic style of chant, the first four cantos of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*'.<sup>1</sup> Later on that year Dorothy told Lady Beaumont what she thought of the poem which had established for Scott an almost unsurpassed fame and made him one of the best-selling authors of the Romantic era and beyond,

We have the Lay of the last Minstrel, and have read it with great pleasure. It is certainly very entertaining, but as you observe the narrative is often obscure, and there is a want of harmony and of beautiful passages to remember, and turn to again. I like the beginning exceedingly, the introduction of the Minstrel, and the Costume of

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<sup>1</sup> J. G. Lockhart *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 7 vols (Edinburgh, 1837-38), Vol. I, p. 403.

Branksome Hall. When we were in Scotland we spent several days in company with Mr Scott, we were at his house, he limped by our side through the groves of Roslin, went with us along the shores of Tiviot, and the Tweed, led us to Melross Abbey and pointed out every famous hill and told some tale of every old Hall we passed by. His local attachments are more strong than those of any person I ever saw—his whole heart and soul seem to be devoted to the Scottish Streams Yarrow Tweed and Tiviot and the rest of them of which we hear in the Border Ballads, and I am sure that there is not a story ever told by the fire-sides in that neighbourhood that he cannot repeat and many more that are not so familiar. He is a man of very sweet manners, mild, cordial and chearful. I have spoken of his limping, but perhaps you do not know that he is lame. I believe he has been so from his birth—he is very stout and tall but I think does not look healthy.<sup>2</sup>

Dorothy's remark that the poem lacks harmony and memorable lines is perhaps due to the multi-layered nature of the poem and its multi-faceted theme, in addition to some other minor factors which might be viewed by some people as hindering smooth reading, such as the similarity in some Border surnames, and the unfamiliar Border place names. Being about an area known for its wild nature and even wilder history of violence and bloodshed, *The Lay's* lack of striking passages – according to Dorothy – is perhaps one result of the nature of its subject matter rather than Scott's talent. When Scott is talking about heart-felt subject matter, his poetry can become very memorable, as in the passages quoted below about his love for his country.

As Dorothy's letter demonstrates, Scott had a deep knowledge of the history, traditions, and landscape of the Borders. And as his autobiography shows, he also possessed the historical imagination necessary to utilize all those elements and bring them together in a literary work. Scott says in his *Memoirs*, 'but shew me an old

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<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont, 4 May 1805, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. I, pp. 590-91.

castle or a field of battle and I was at home at once, filled it with its combatants in their proper costume and overwhelmed my hearers by the enthusiasm of my description.’<sup>3</sup> This is exactly what he does in *The Lay*: he brings the history of the Borders during two distinct eras back to life, filling in the details of life, manners and customs, using both his historical knowledge as well as vivid imagination. Despite its apparent lack of harmony reported by Dorothy, the different threads of the poem’s plot do come together at the end, delivering a message which is perhaps made clearer by Scott’s use of a story-within-a-story, and more easily discernible when looked at from the privileged vantage point of hindsight. In order to explicate and highlight the poem’s structure and multi-layered plot, I will use Homer’s *Odyssey* later in this chapter to bring forward the parallels between the two poems in an attempt to clarify those elements in readers’ minds when later discussed in *The Lay*.

Despite Dorothy’s, and perhaps some other readers’, lukewarm reception of the poem, the success of *The Lay* was phenomenal and long-lived. If Scott was ‘by far, the most popular author of the Romantic period and later, both in verse and in prose, not only in Great Britain but in English-speaking communities elsewhere’, it was *The Lay* that established his fame and paved the way for him to become the most widely read writer of his time.<sup>4</sup> The demand for the poem was unprecedented; copies were flying off the shelves and a thousand others were printed every year. ‘In the history of British Poetry,’ notes Lockhart, ‘nothing has ever equalled the demand for the Lay of the Last Minstrel.’ Forty thousand copies were sold before the edition of 1830 appeared with the added introduction.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Scott on Himself*, ed. by David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 632.

<sup>5</sup> Lockhart, Vol. II, p. 35.

Scott's success, however, did not go as smoothly as he would have wished. He was accused of plagiarizing the metre of Coleridge's unpublished 'Christabel'—an allegation he felt he had to refer to in the substantial introduction he added to the 1830 edition of the poem. Scott admits that he owes to 'Christabel' the 'singularly irregular structure of the stanzas, and the liberty which it allowed to adapt the sound to the sense' (p. 52). 'It is to Mr. Coleridge,' he adds, 'that I am bound to make the acknowledgement due from the pupil to his master.' Coleridge himself did not think much of the accusation when he read Scott's poem, neither did anyone who knew that Scott only heard the poem recited to him by a mutual friend of his and Coleridge's, Sir John Stoddart, several years before either he started writing his poem or Coleridge published his.<sup>6</sup> The experimental new meter of four stress lines rhyming in couplets or in groups of four gave *The Lay* a light pace and helped move the action forward quickly—something which was not applied to serious poetry before Coleridge. This certainly served Scott's purpose very well as the story he tells takes place in just 'Three Nights and Three Days' (Preface, p. [1]), unfolding multitudinous events and changes of fortune in a relatively short period, making Coleridge's meter a truly perfect adaptation of 'the sound to the sense'.

*The Lay* is a nostalgic poem. It celebrates a time long gone by which was both heroic and violent. The frame storytelling of an aged minstrel provides a glimpse of the ancient tradition of minstrelsy, which was on the brink of extinction at the time the bard was portrayed in the poem as roaming the roads looking for food and shelter in return for his song. Once an audience was secured, the man begins chanting his lay, which is about an older time still when Border reiving was in full swing. What the poem laments is the loss of the beautiful and honourable characteristics of that

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<sup>6</sup> For a recent view of the controversy see Seamus Perry, 'Coleridge's Literary Influence' in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 661-76.

chivalric age whose arbitrary violence, Scott thought, could have been stopped through the power of love. It was such traditions as minstrelsy and the noble codes of honour associated with the past, and repeatedly highlighted in the poem, that the poet perhaps felt nostalgic for. But the poem is not only about the past: it is also very current and addresses issues which were pertinent to the main concerns of Scott's age. The warring Border families, and the eruptive struggle with the English side of the border line could be taken to symbolize the political situation in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars. When Scott was writing his poem, Britain was under the threat of French invasion, and it is believed that *The Lay* is Scott's response to this threat: that the poet is trying to use Border society as an example of a community long torn by its internal and external struggles, finally relinquishing its differences and reaching peace and unity -- both vital in stemming any future external attacks.

Many readers of *The Lay* tackle it from the perspective of the conflict among the Scots clans themselves on the one hand, and between the English and the Scots on the other. Those critics seem to agree that Scott uses history to reflect and comment on the political and military situation of his day. Richard Cronin, for instance, notes that 'it seems more than a coincidence that the years of Scott's significant poetic achievement, the years in which he compiled the *Minstrelsy* and wrote his first three narrative poems, coincided with those years in which there were recurrent invasion alarms.'<sup>7</sup> This fact, Cronin adds, 'is unsurprising, for the war with France constituted the historical moment at which Scott's antiquarian love of old ballads coincided with the demands of the present.'<sup>8</sup> Scott's passion for ballad collection was relegated to a secondary position when national security became an extremely pressing matter. The imminent French danger was perhaps part of the reason Scott decided to publish *The*

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Cronin, 'Walter Scott and Anti-Gallican Minstrelsy' in *The Politics of Romantic Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 99-100.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

*Lay* as a separate poem, not an addition to the *Minstrelsy*, as originally conceived.<sup>9</sup>

The poet must have thought that *The Lay*, as an independent poem with its own vision, would have a greater impact than would a section at the end of a ballad collection. Simon Bainbridge, in his seminal discussion of Scott's war romances, contends that the poet

Was by far the best selling and most popular poet of the Napoleonic wars and his metrical romances played a crucial role in mediating conflict to a nation at war. In a period when warfare was seen to have taken on a new form, to have become 'modern', Scott's phenomenally successful tales of 'Border chivalry' transformed the imagining of war, presenting it as heroic, shaped by the codes of romance, and framed by the conventions of the picturesque.<sup>10</sup>

Bainbridge claims that Scott's popularity comes in part from his success in turning his readers into warriors through his picturesque portrayal of war. By setting his romances in the sixteenth century, Scott hoped to 'restore the "martial spirit" of the earlier warlike periods to his modern readership'.<sup>11</sup> The picturesque depiction of war as heroic and honourable – and thus positive – was only possible by going back in time, for 'the scientific and technical character of modern warfare made it resistant to artistic representation'. The employment of the picturesque helped Scott assume 'the role of the pro-war, national poet after more than a decade in which the dominant strain of war poetry had asked readers to imagine war's horrors and to feel for its victims'. Scott, Bainbridge holds, sought to spare his readers the real horrors of war by presenting it as something glorified and aesthetically pleasing. Yet the picturesque

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<sup>9</sup> *The Lay* was initially intended as an addition to the section of the *Minstrelsy* entitled 'Imitations of the Ancient Ballad', but the sheer length of the poem when completed did not allow for this. Susan Oliver, 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel: A Poem', *The Literary Encyclopedia* <http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=384> accessed 31 May 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 120.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.



also implies the employment of terror, or the sublime, and Scott provides this through his gory and detailed descriptions of combat, be it group or single.<sup>12</sup> In such portrayals, Scott does not ask his readers to sympathize with the victims of war. War is glorious, and the people participating in it should be happy to have had the honour to take part in it. This is nowhere more evident than in a letter Scott wrote to someone grieving over the death of a friend in battle: 'I grieve for your loss at Barossa,' Scott writes, 'but what more glorious fall could a man select for himself or friend, than dying with his sword in hand and the cry of victory in his ear?''<sup>13</sup> This is why Scott is very unlikely to have ever been the author of such an account as Wordsworth's story in *The Prelude* of the frail, shell-shocked discharged soldier.

Andrew Lincoln refutes the claim made by some that Scott is an escapist, placing the poet's return to the past within the era's larger framework of political, social and military upheaval. He maintains that 'when Scott turned to the late feudal era in his early poetic romances, it was not simply to escape the problems of the modern nation, but to represent their origin and to suggest his own relation to them' in an age 'rendered anxious by the threat of invasion, by Napoleon's dominance of continental Europe, and by political weakness at home'.<sup>14</sup> John Sutherland also believes that a possible reason behind the writing of the poem is the 'military excitement of the time,'<sup>15</sup> whereas other critics believe otherwise: Alice Chandler, for example, argues that Scott 'does not use the past to castigate and correct the present, as later medievalists were to do; nor does he turn feudalism into a political program.'<sup>16</sup> She discusses some of Scott's works in relation to three influences: 'the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Bainbridge, p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Lincoln, 'Walter Scott and the Birth of the Nation' *Romanticism* 8 (2002), 1-17 (pp. 4, 6).

<sup>15</sup> John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Chandler, 'Sir Walter Scott and the Medieval Revival', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 19 (1965), 315-332 (p.315).

scholarly, the Gothic, and the primitive,' but she does not relate any of the aspects of the poems discussed under these categories to the current situation of Scott's day.

I share the view of the majority of critics who argue that Scott's employment of history is a means of understanding the present and furnishing it with the lessons necessary for a peaceful and prosperous life. However, my thesis tackles this approach to history from the perspective of nature and place, looking at the manner in which Scott employed a specific place, its tradition, customs, history, and landscape, to revive in people the enthusiasm for a chivalric past in which war was a noble effort, and to elicit from this history lessons about the power of love and understanding and their important role in the face of danger. This exploration of the theme of nature in the Scottish Borders as reflected in *The Lay* is designed to examine the role nature and place played in Scott's poem, especially in so far as their similarities and differences with the way these two concepts are approached by Wordsworth in the selection of his poems chosen for this thesis. My approach in this chapter addresses the theme of warfare in *The Lay* as part of the poem's three-stranded plot of love, war, and the supernatural. One of the aims of this reading is to investigate whether nature was merely an external force of tradition and history which Scott used as a vehicle for conveying his themes, or whether there were nuances to this vision which require a more careful reading of Scott's poetry to reveal themselves. The answer to this question will form part of the comparison central to the purposes of this thesis between Wordsworth and Scott.

As the central figure in the poem, and perhaps Scott's mouthpiece, the minstrel is going to be introduced in a separate section, which also touches upon some of the themes emerging from a treatment of this character. Concluding this chapter is a comparison invited by Scott's repeated portrayal of Melrose abbey in *The Lay*. I

compare Melrose with two abbeys occurring in poems by Wordsworth: Tintern and Furness, both of which are spots of nature, places which are closely linked with nature just like their Scottish counterpart.

Before beginning my discussion of *The Lay* as detailed above, I will give a brief account of the history of two key elements relating to the poem: the Borders area and the minstrelsy tradition. I will also briefly reiterate Scott's relationship with the Borders, already outlined in the Introduction, which contributed to forming his identity and certainly aided him in writing *The Lay*.

### **The Anglo-Scottish Borders: A Brief Historical and Geographical Introduction**

Having been disputed in previous centuries, the route of the Border between Scotland and England was agreed in the thirteenth century. This agreement took place in 1237 when The Treaty of York was signed by both England and Scotland to the effect that the Border should be marked by the River Tweed in the east and the Solway Firth in the west.<sup>17</sup> There have been only minor modifications to the line of the Border since then. The phrase 'The Borders', referring not simply to a line, but to land to the north of the border, is exclusively Scottish usage. The two English counties of Cumberland, now known as Cumbria, and Northumberland adjoin the border on the English side, but the phrase 'The Borders' is not used in the same way about them. This may be due to the fact that Scotland has only one land border –with England, while England has two, with Scotland and with Wales, requiring a speaker to be specific as to which is meant. It is noticeable in Scott's *Lay* that the English and Scottish borderers are not

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<sup>17</sup> G. W. S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), Part I, chapter 4, 'The Anglo-Scottish order', pp.139-161.

disputing the line of the Border itself, but fighting for power or for cattle, sometimes across this line.

The Borders have a history of widespread violence which gave the area a notorious reputation and had an effect on its inhabitants, as George Macdonald Fraser points out in *Steel Bonnets*,

If there are qualities in the Border people which are less than amiable, it must be understood that they were shaped by the kind of continuous ordeal that has passed most of Britain by [...] for almost 300 years, from the late thirteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth, they lived on a battle field that stretched from the Solway to the North sea. War after war was fought on it, and this, to put it mildly, had an effect on the folk who lived there.<sup>18</sup>

In the later Middle Ages and Early Modern Period England and Scotland developed as two separate countries with different monarchs, parliaments, and legal systems. It was only when Queen Elizabeth I of England died in March 1603 without having married or produced any children of her own that the House of Tudor came to an end, and the road was paved for the reigning Scottish monarch, King James VI, to become the King of England too. James' great grandmother, Margaret Tudor, had married King James IV of Scotland in 1503. She was the eldest daughter of King Henry VII of England, Elizabeth's grandfather. James VI became king of Scotland in 1567 and was, upon the death of Elizabeth, seen as the most rightful—and suitable—heir to the English throne. He was crowned as James I of England on 11 July, 1603. The two countries remained effectively separate after this union, and retained their own parliaments and laws. The only change which this union effected was that the head of both states became the same. It was only in 1707 that the Scots Parliament and the English Parliament united to form the Parliament of Great Britain. The theft,

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<sup>18</sup> G. M. Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1971), pp 3-5.

kidnapping, burning of property and land, and murder which had become daily practices for the Borderers before the Union of the Crowns took place greatly subsided afterwards. By the time the two parliaments came together, blood feuds and cross-border skirmishes were a thing of the past.

Borderers have a culture which is not shared by people outside the Borders. The vendettas and reiving they were notorious for, for example, were not known to other areas either in Scotland or England. Walter Elliot goes even as far as claiming that ‘there were and are really three countries in the land called Great Britain–England and Wales is one; Scotland is another and the Borders [...] form a third separate entity.’<sup>19</sup> The region constituting the Borders is geographically unique too. It features rolling hills, rivers, and wide moors, and does not have high crags or vast lakes such as those adorning the landscape in neighbouring regions, especially the Lake District in England and the Highlands in Scotland.

In *The Lay* Scott talks about the customs and beliefs of the Border society, its warlike reality, and its landscape. Scott’s familiarity with all of these aspects of Border life comes from the time he spent at his grandparents’ farm in Sandyknowe, where he regained some of his strength, and developed a love for the neighbourhood of Kelso and for Border traditions and folk tales which had a strong impact on his life and imagination, as I have pointed out in the Introduction.

It was in the Borders that Scott learnt to look at the beauties of nature and appreciate them too, as has been noted earlier in Scott’s description of Kelso as perhaps the most charming and ‘romantic village in Scotland.’ Renowned for its charm, Kelso had outstanding natural features to offer the child, including the meeting of two rivers, the Tweed and the Teviot, and the ruins of Roxburgh Castle which

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<sup>19</sup> Walter Elliot, ‘War of Independence to the Union of the Crowns: 1296-1603’ in *The Borders Book*, ed. by Donald Omand (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 1995), p. 77.

dominate the village's skyline. This blend of a distinct landscape imbued with historical relics suited Scott's particular type of imagination well: 'from this time,' he reminisces, 'my love of natural beauty more especially when combined with ancient ruins or remains of our fathers' piety or splendour, became with me an insatiable passion.' His admiration of the 'grand features of the landscape [...] and the historical incidents or the traditional legends connected with many of them' was akin to 'a sort of intense impression of reverence'.<sup>20</sup> In a place like this Scott's imagination must have thrived and found abundant resources to feed on. Indeed Scott further describes in his *Memoirs* how he seldom looked at a river, building or an object without immediately imagining what it must have been like in the past and what incidents took place in its vicinity. It was probably this strong passion for the past and Scott's vivid imagination that allowed him to set his *Lay* in the ruins of Newark castle, which was not far from Ashestiel, where he moved in 1804.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Minstrel Figure**

The *Lay* falls in six cantos and is told by a minstrel whose presence is apparent at the beginning and end of each canto, where he breaks his narrative and either makes a remark, comments on the events of the story, or answers questions put forth by one of the women listening to his song, thus 'blurring the very historical distances that the logic of the poem demands', and allowing Scott to 'lay [...] claim to his own Bardic authority in the poem.'<sup>22</sup>

Scott wrote a short Preface and added a series of long historical notes to the poem. In the Preface he states that the purpose behind writing *The Lay* is 'to illustrate

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> The ruins of Newark castle were also not far from Abbotsford, Scott's last home to which he moved in 1812.

<sup>22</sup> Dentith, p. 40.

the custom and manners which anciently prevailed on the Borders of England and Scotland.<sup>23</sup> It was more his aim to show his readers the ‘scenery and manners’ of that area than to attempt a ‘combined and regular narrative,’ he claims. He also sets the date of the minstrel’s song to be ‘about the middle of the sixteenth century, when most of the personages actually flourished.’<sup>24</sup> This is, however, not the same time as the frame story. The minstrel was roaming the Borders searching for an audience in the late seventeenth century, a time when ‘Old times were changed, old manners gone;/A stranger fill’d the Stuarts’ throne.’<sup>25</sup> The minstrel is telling his audience a story of the past just as Scott was telling his readers of the early nineteenth century a story about minstrelsy, an outdated tradition which was once an important part of the Border society.<sup>26</sup> Scott believed that when minstrelsy flourished poets were ‘the historians and often the priests of the society.’<sup>27</sup> *The Lay*’s minstrel acts as a historian through whom only the preservation of the past becomes possible, handing down tales of history in the form of song from generation to generation, until a historian of more advanced times is able to begin recording this history in writing. Like his minstrel, Scott too was a historian, recording the past in his poetry. But Scott was one of the ‘priests of the society’ too, trying to heal his country people by telling of mostly historic characters who lived a long time ago, such as the two strong female figures

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<sup>23</sup> Scott: *Poetical Works*, ed. by J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), Preface, p. [1]. All subsequent quotations from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* will be taken from this edition, and, since the text does not give line numbers, canto and stanza numbers, or where these do not apply, page numbers, will be given in brackets after the quotation.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Introduction, p. [1]. The ‘stranger’ is William III (1688-1702) who became king in the right of his wife Mary after the Stuart James II had fled.

<sup>26</sup> Minstrels were medieval performers who often used to entertain the upper class by singing tales about different interesting subjects, some imaginary and some real. They stopped appealing to royalty when troubadours appeared on the scene, and they later had abandon court and led a wandering life playing to people and living on the money, food and shelter they offered them. They continued to entertain till the middle years of the Renaissance.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Scott, ‘An Essay on Romance’ (1824), in *The Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 28 vols (Edinburgh, 1834-36), Vol. VI, p.163.

from the Buccleuch family, Ann Scott in the frame narrative, and Janet Scott in the minstrel's lay.

In 'An Essay on the Ancient Minstrels in England' Thomas Percy introduces minstrels as,

An order of men in the middle ages, who subsisted by the arts of poetry and music, and sang to the harp verses composed by themselves, or others. [...] The Minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient Bards, who, under different names were admired and revered, from the earliest ages [...] by almost all the first inhabitants of Europe, whether of Celtic or Gothic race.<sup>28</sup>

Minstrels were held in high esteem for a long time, and their position in society only began to dwindle during the reign of King Henry VIII, when it was 'a common entertainment to hear verses recited [...] by a set of men who got their livelihood by repeating them.' Those men 'intruded without ceremony into all companies; not only in taverns, but in the houses of the nobility themselves' (p. xlvii). 'In the reign of Queen Elizabeth,' Percy tells us, 'this class of men had lost all credit' (p. li). Their status continued to decline so much so that 'in the 39<sup>th</sup> year of Elizabeth, a statute was passed by which "Minstrels, wandering abroad," were included among "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars," and were adjudged to be punished as such. This act seems to have put an end to the profession (p. li).' Minstrels were most probably officially extinct by the end of Queen Elizabeth I's reign (p. liv).

Scott mentions other reasons for the demise of minstrelsy. He maintains in his 'Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballads' that, alongside some other factors, printing has 'necessarily occasioned the downfall of the Order of Minstrels.'<sup>29</sup> Songs

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 3 vols, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (London, 1794), Vol. I, pp. xxi-xxii. Percy's *Reliques* was first published in 1765; Scott owned a copy of the 4<sup>th</sup> edition (J. G. Cochrane, *Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford* (Edinburgh, 1838) p. 172).

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Simon Dentith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 36.



and ballads were now preserved in books available for most people to read and enjoy in the privacy of their own studies or living rooms. In *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* both Scott and the old minstrel who sings the lay represent the last minstrel, each in his own way. The old minstrel is the last remaining performer after all his friends have passed away and no more people were willing to become minstrels. Scott is also the last minstrel because he is the artist who is actually preserving the old bard's song in his poetry. Scott's medium of expression is the more enduring one, for, whereas the minstrel's song will die away once he himself is dead, Scott's own lay will live on in books for posterity to read.

*The Lay* invites comparison between the poet and his aged minstrel, not simply because they could be both taken to be preservers of ancient tradition, nor because they are both northerners. As Percy points out, 'There is scarce an old historical song or Ballad wherein a Minstrel or Harper appears, but he is characterized by way of eminence to have been "of the North Country"'.<sup>30</sup> This may be why the minstrel tells his lady attendants at Newark Tower that he refuses to go down south in search for a better life even though this meant that he had to ask for food from door to door (VI, i). Leaving the region to go south would apparently result in the loss of the old man's identity. This is probably why he says that people who do such a thing have killed their souls, as I will show later. First, however, I will discuss the similarities between Scott and his last minstrel, before moving on to discuss the plot of the poem.

When we read Scott's following description of the minstrel, 'The last of all the Bards was he,/Who sung of Border chivalry,' we might be slightly inclined to regard it as referring to Scott himself, not just to his 'infirm and old' minstrel (Introduction, p. [1]). This is doubly justified: not only was Scott indeed the last major artist to sing

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, Vol. I, p. li.

of the glorious chivalrous past of the Borders; he also admitted that he considered himself a minstrel. Having given a detailed explanation of his lineage on both sides in his *Memoirs*, Scott exclaims, ‘no bad genealogy for a Border minstrel.’ Later on in his recollections he describes how ‘in the winter play hours when hard exercise was impossible my tales used to assemble an admiring audience round Lucky Brown’s fireside and happy was he that could sit next to the inexhaustible narrator.’<sup>31</sup> Scott, then, thought of himself as being a minstrel. The bard in *The Lay*, furthermore, who has ‘withered cheek, and tresses gray,’ gives the impression that he has ‘known a better day’ (Introduction, p. [1]). And indeed he has – for Scott tells us next that the bard’s colleagues were all dead, and that he too wished he would be laid beside them soon. This is because of the decline in esteem minstrels suffered after the Stuarts’ throne has been usurped and ‘The bigots of the iron time/Had call’d [their] harmless art a crime’ (Introduction, p. [2]). Subsequently, bards were no longer ‘courted and caress’d,/High placed in hall’ as ‘welcome guest[s].’ The old man has become instead ‘A wandering Harper, scorned and poor,’ who ‘begg’d his bread from door to door,/And tuned, to please a peasant’s ear,/The harp a king had loved to hear’. This account of financial difficulty forcing the minstrel to perform for an audience he would not usually perform to for lack of means finds some echoes in Scott’s account of the circumstances of his composition of *The Lay*,

The second edition of [*The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*], published in 1803, proved, in the language of the trade, rather a heavy concern. [...] It was, on the whole, one of those books which are more praised than they are read.

At this time I stood personally in a different position from that which I occupied when I first dipt my desperate pen in ink for other purposes than those of my profession. In 1796, when I first published the translations from Bürger, I was an insulated

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<sup>31</sup> *Scott on Himself*, pp. 2, 21.

individual, with only my own wants to provide for, and having, in a great measure, my own inclinations alone to consult. In 1803, when the second edition of the *Minstrelsy* appeared, I had arrived at a period of life when men, however thoughtless, encounter duties and circumstances which press consideration and plans of life upon the most careless minds. I had been for some time married—was the father of a rising family, and, though fully enabled to meet the consequent demands upon me, it was my duty and desire to place myself in a situation which would enable me to make honourable provision against the various contingencies of life.<sup>32</sup>

In a sense Scott had to write in order to support his family just as the minstrel had to sing in order to survive. Later on in life Scott was to find himself in a position very similar to his aging character: someone who was once a celebrated artist with many a fan but whose fortunes turned and he lost his high status and was reduced to working hard in old age in difficult circumstances to survive.

The singing of the lay by the minstrel was commissioned by the lady of Newark Castle, the Duchess of Buccleuch. Her generosity and noble origins inspired the bard to sing to her and her lady attendants a lay he has chosen especially for them. Once the artist's 'wants' had been 'supplied,/And the old man was gratified,/[He] began to rise his minstrel pride' (Introduction). He asked the lady if she would 'deign/To listen to an old man's strain'. This 'humble boon was soon obtained;/The aged minstrel audience gained'. The bard picked a song he had not played for a long time, one which is fit for 'high dames and mighty earls', and not 'framed for village churls' (Introduction, p. [2]). This is reminiscent of one of Scott's own reasons for writing his poem,

The lovely young Countess of Dalkeith, afterwards Harriet Duchess of Buccleuch, had come to the land of her husband with the desire of making herself acquainted

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<sup>32</sup> Introduction to the 1830 edition of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* in *Scott: Poetical Works*, p. [49].

with its traditions and customs, as well as its manners and history. [...] she soon heard enough of Border lore; among others, an aged gentleman of property, near Langholm, communicated to her ladyship the story of Gilpin Horner, a tradition in which the narrator, and many more of that country, were firm believers. The young Countess, much delighted with the legend, and the gravity and full confidence with which it was told, enjoined on me as a task to compose a ballad on the subject. Of course, to hear was to obey.<sup>33</sup>

Scott, then, was another bard inspired by one Duchess of Buccleuch to sing of ancient Border traditions and legends. Like his fictional character, Scott too is partly moved into performing his art by the person who was the chief member of audience. In fact, the poet does not make it secret that the lady's beauty and grace made everyone even more willing to fulfil her wishes. He dedicates a rather long description to her superior qualities,

All who remember this lady will agree, that the intellectual character of her extreme beauty, the amenity and courtesy of her manners, the soundness of her understanding, and her unbounded benevolence, gave more the idea of an angelic visitant, than of a being belonging to this nether world; and such a thought was but too consistent with the short space she was permitted to tarry among us. Of course, [...] all made it a pride and pleasure to gratify her wishes.<sup>34</sup>

It was probably partly due to the lady's 'unbounded benevolence' that Scott decided to write the poem. As an earlier quote demonstrates, Scott had some concerns and doubts about the future, and wanted to be able to always provide a good livelihood for his family. That is why he may have thought of an ending to the poem which will convey his own wish for the lady's patronage. The poem ends with the aged minstrel being designated a 'lowly bower;/A simple hut' to live in 'close beneath proud

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

Newark's tower' (VI, xxxi). He divided his time between giving alms in the winter, 'For much he loved to ope his door,/And give the aid he begged before,' and singing in the summer until 'the rapt traveller would stay,/Forgetful of the closing day.' By making the Duchess grant the old minstrel a home near her castle, Scott was perhaps hinting at a similar scenario which he wished to see happen to him at some point in the future. Lockhart declares that the hut and garden the bard got as a reward were a veiled allusion to Scott's own wistful interest, at the time of writing in 1804, in 'the small estate of *Broadmeadows*, situated just over against the ruins of Newark on the northern bank of the Yarrow'<sup>35</sup> adjoining the Buccleuch hunting-lodge, Bowhill. By being allowed to spend the rest of his life at Broadmeadows, Scott implies, he would be busy writing poetry which entertains not only the duchess herself, but passers-by as well, just like his old minstrel who sang to everyone of all that is noble and good.

The idea of a home, or, by extension, a homeland to which the minstrel belongs, and which he refuses to abandon despite the strong temptation, is yet another parallel between Scott and his bard: the ladies ask the singer

Why he, who touch'd the harp so well,  
Should thus, with ill-rewarded toil,  
Wander a poor and thankless soil,  
When the more generous Southern land  
Would well requite his skilful hand.

(V, xxx)

Although the south may have better opportunities to offer him, and, by implication, Scott himself, the old artist refuses to leave his country in search for financial gain. He loves Scotland too much to abandon her, 'O Caledonia!' he exclaims, 'stern and wild,/Meet nurse for a poetic child/[...] what mortal hand/can e'er untie the filial

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<sup>35</sup> Lockhart, Vol. II, p. 26.

band' (VI, ii). Scott here refers to the role the wilds of Scotland have played in the formation of his poetic identity, a bond which is probably even stronger than normal filial feelings one usually has for one's homeland because it is to this place and these forms in particular that he owes the budding of his talent. The minstrel identifies himself with the Scottish Borders, especially the valleys of the Yarrow, Ettrick and Teviot. These are the only friends he now has in old age, and he would die happily if could die 'by Teviot Stone,' in another indication of the strong affinity he feels with nature, which here plays the role of the mother on whose lap he would like to breathe his last breath. The minstrel adds yet another reason for not leaving one's homeland: to do so, he maintains, is to die while still alive (VI, i): he invites his audience to 'go, mark [...] well' someone 'Who never to himself hath said,/This is my own, my native land!' for

Him no Minstrel raptures swell;  
 High though his titles, proud his name,  
 Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;  
 Despite those titles, power, and pelf,  
 The wretch, concentred all in self,  
 Living, shall forfeit fair renown,  
 And doubly dying, shall go down  
 [...]  
 Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung.

(VI, i)

Scott's somewhat harsh attack on those who opt to travel away from their countries when all attempts at finding a decent living there have failed may be seen as hinting at his own situation. For, though struggling financially himself, Scott refused to leave his dear native land in search of a better opportunity. His bard did the same and his

loyalty was finally rewarded. The voice of the speaker in the previous passage, it has been suggested, is ‘hard to distinguish [...] from the voice of Scott himself’ as it has ‘an especial reference in the heightened patriotic atmosphere of 1805’.<sup>36</sup> Scott’s admiration for people who refuse to abandon their land when the circumstances turn unfavourable could also be taken as an invitation for his readers to stand by their country, not leaving it, during such a charged period in its history as the time *The Lay* was composed. This patriotic sentiment is a modern one. It flourished with the collapse of the feudal system, ‘the rise of strong central government, and [...] the progress towards the modern commercial society’.<sup>37</sup> It is particularly significant in times of war, especially as people’s allegiances had to be channelled and directed toward a central government now that loyalty to a clan or family was no longer the norm. In the foregoing lines the poet is trying to ingrain in readers’ minds a type of patriotism in which ‘loyalty is attached to a generalized “land” rather than an intimately known territory, and identity is defined in relation to a nation rather than by feudal service and codes of honour’.<sup>38</sup>

This Scottish-British patriotic sentiment the poem tries to promote has been criticised by some critics as paradoxical. Dentith, for instance, states that ‘the national question remains a troubling one’ because ‘the logic of a poem like *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* [...] is to suggest a specifically local, Border or Scottish, national context for the poetry, while Scott also wishes to assert a wider British patriotism. In the particular context of this poem he fails to resolve this difficulty, and the invocation to Caledonia remains unchallenged, or unincorporated into any wider unity’.<sup>39</sup> This slightly confusing nature of the sensitive question of nationhood does

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<sup>36</sup> Dentith, p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Lincoln, pp. 2-3.

<sup>38</sup> Dentith, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

not mean that Scott's vision of unity is not clearly expressed in the poem, however. *The Lay* conveys this message successfully, especially through Scott's portrayal of war.

As the central figure in the frame story of Scott's *Lay* and its narrator, the minstrel has been introduced in this section within the larger framework of the minstrelsy tradition, before he was contrasted with his creator, Scott, bringing out the similarities between the two 'Last Minstrel[s]' as historians and preservers of the past. Some of the issues arising from this comparison have also been discussed, paving the way for a more thorough examination of the poem in the following section.

### **Epic and the Three-Strand plot**

*The Lay* has some significant similarities with Homer's masterpiece, *The Odyssey*, which suggests that the ancient epic is one of Scott's earliest sources. Those similarities will be explored in what follows, bringing out the role nature plays in the development of the poem's themes, or that of characters or action, whenever possible. This section is, however, more concerned with place as it mainly discusses certain customs and ancient practices upheld by the inhabitant of the Scottish Border.

After the old minstrel is granted permission to perform his lay in front of the Duchess, he enters the 'room of state' in Newark castle where she and her lady attendants sit waiting for his performance. Unexpectedly,

Perchance he wished his boon denied:  
For when to tune his harp he tried,  
His trembling hand had lost the ease,  
Which marks security to please:  
And scenes long past, of joy and pain,  
Came wildering o'er his aged brain.



(Introduction, p. [2])

The aging minstrel's temporary breakdown while he painfully remembers past scenes of 'joy and pain' is reminiscent of Odysseus, the protagonist of *The Odyssey*, an aging, nameless wandering figure who, like Scott's minstrel, arrives destitute at a court to beg the assistance of kindly royal figures. Arriving incognito at the court of the Phaeacians, Odysseus begs for passage to his home of Ithaka, which he chose over the wealth and immortality he was previously offered in foreign lands. Remembering the great sufferings of his past, Odysseus breaks down in trembling and tears before engaging in the telling of a lay filled with love, quarrels, magic, the supernatural, and disguised identities. While listening to the blind minstrel Demodocus perform several heroic lays, the disguised Odysseus 'grasped his great purple cloak with his stout hands, and drew it down over his head, and hid his handsome face; for he felt shame before the Phaeacians as he let fall tears from beneath his eyebrows'.<sup>40</sup> Odysseus breaks down in tears because the 'Muse stirred the minstrel to sing of the glorious deeds of men, from that lay the fame of which had then reached broad heaven, the quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles' (VIII, 71-74). Like Scott's minstrel, Odysseus is unable to hide his emotions as he relives this episode from his past. When he is pressured by the Phaeacians into revealing his true identity, Odysseus complies and later plays the role of a minstrel who narrates to his hosts the heroic events of his ten-year wanderings en route back home from the Trojan War.

The lay which Demodocus sings to entertain the royal family and their guests includes several themes: there is, amongst many others, the theme of war represented by the Trojan War and the Trojan Horse stratagem, the Quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles, and the amusing tale of a love affair between two Olympian gods: Ares and

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<sup>40</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, Books 1-12, with an English translation by A. T. Murray, rev. by George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), Book VIII, 82-86, p. 279.

Aphrodite. Demodocus' lay reveals the three-stranded plot of Homer's epic woven around the themes of love, war, and the supernatural. This is probably one of the main sources of the similar three-stranded plot of Scott's *Lay*, which tells of war between the English and the Scots and among the Scots themselves, of a single combat between William of Deloraine and Richard Musgrave, of an act of magic whereby the young Lord Cranstoun assumes the likeness of Deloraine and kills his opponent in combat, and of a love story between Margaret, the daughter of the Duchess of Buccleuch, and Lord Cranstoun. Like *The Odyssey* too, Scott's *Lay* is largely about pride and its consequences.

The similar three-stranded plot in the two epic poems arises out of periods of great social, economic and political transformation, wherein the values embodied within expressions of love, war, and the spiritual inclination needed to be reassessed. The frame story in Scott's poem, which is mainly concerned with the old minstrel and his singing to the ladies at Newark castle, takes place in the aftermath of the Reformation, which destroyed long established traditions, including minstrelsy, and estranged the people whose lives were dependent on them. This tension between the past and the present is the first thing we encounter as we delve into the world of *The Lay*. Minstrelsy was dying out, and the minstrel we encounter has lost all his fellow minstrels: 'for, welladay! Their date was fled,/His tuneful brethren all were dead.' This was because 'Old times were changed, old manners gone' (Introduction, p. [1]), the minstrel explains.

'Border chivalry' has almost become a thing of the past as a result of changing times, and, with the ensuing disappearance of minstrels, there was little hope that future generations would hear of their forefathers' heroic way of life. It was the lady's kindness that encouraged the minstrel to sing about the past once more, and ultimately

gave him back his status as a bard who is never far away from noble personages, singing his lays for them and for whoever is willing to hear of the glorious past. At the time Scott was writing *The Lay* Britain was under the threat of French invasion with all the uncertainty and fear this breeds in people's hearts. Similarly, the world of *The Odyssey* does not stand on solid foundations, with the great Trojan War having just ended and an ambiguous future facing all parties concerned.

The new world the French Revolution heralded espouses more modern, commercialized, cosmopolitan and democratic values, ones which can be seen as beginning to infringe upon the world of *The Lay*, and similar ones can also be seen as eclipsing the heroic world of *The Odyssey*. The historical period of tension covered by *The Lay* echoes Odysseus's own world: Homer's masterpiece revolves around the vacuum which occurs when two contrasting orders of socio-political organization, one old and the other new, are fighting to maintain power. The tension mainly takes place as old heroic values are being uprooted and new more utilitarian ones are being planted in their stead. This process of change is responded to differently by different people. Homer and Scott seem to be amongst those who have called for preserving the heroic values of the past, and opted for poetry as a means of this preservation.

The Border warfare theme of the three-stranded plot is two-fold: there is reference to tension and bloodshed between different Scottish clans, and to an ongoing war between the English and the Scots. War is first introduced in the poem when the minstrel passes 'the embattled portal arch' of Newark tower, 'Whose ponderous grate and massy bar/Had oft rolled back the tide of war' (Introduction, p. [2]). The master of the house, we learn next, has been killed, and his wife 'In pride of power, in beauty's bloom,/Had wept o'er Monmouth's bloody tomb'. The Lady in question is Ann, Duchess of Buccleuch, widow of James Scott, Duke of Monmouth,

who was the illegitimate son of Charles II. When the king died James Scott rebelled in an attempt to make the Scotts kings of England and Scotland. His plan failed miserably and he was captured, tried and later executed for treason in 1685. War and bloodshed also loom on the horizon in the lay which the minstrel sings to the mourning lady and her attendants. At Branksome, where the lay is set in the sixteenth century, renowned knights filled the 'lofty hall' of the castle, 'Ten of them sheathed in steel,/With belted sword, and spur on heel' (I, iv). These brave knights were in such a state of alertness that they 'carv'd at the meal/With gloves of steel,/And they drank the red wine through the helmet barr'd'. The cause of this high degree of readiness is the fear of English invasion: 'They watch against Southern force and guile,/Lest Scroop, or Howard, or Percy's powers,/Threaten Branksome's lordly towers' (I, vi). But the effects of war go even deeper than first meets the eye, for

He, the chieftain of them all,  
His sword hangs rusting on the wall,  
Beside his broken spear.  
Bards long shall tell  
How Lord Walter fell!  
When startled burghers fled, afar,  
The furies of the Border war;  
When the streets of high Dunedin  
Saw lances gleam, and falchions redden,  
And heard the slogan's deadly yell—  
Then the chief of Branksome fell.

(I, vii)

Branksome has no male leader because the lord of the castle, Lord Walter Scott, had been killed by a rival Scottish clan, the Kerrs, in a blood feud. This image of a group

of people anticipating an invasion for which they are well prepared echoes Britain's own war preparations and the several invasion scares they experienced at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup>

The Border society in which the Ladye in the lay lives is internally divided and torn by vendettas and blind vengeance which have been going on for a long time with no hope of ceasing soon. Scott raises the question whether 'piety,' 'Christian lore,' or 'blessed charity' can 'heal,/Or stanch the death-feud's enmity,' and answers the question himself with a resounding 'no!'. The poet realizes that peace is impossible 'While Cessford owns the rule of Carr,/While Ettrick boasts the line of Scott' (I, viii). As long as society is divided and people blindly follow the dictates of the narrow interests of their clans regardless of the collective good of society, peace will never prevail. Pride which such a society advocates allows very little room for mercy, charity or love to flourish.<sup>42</sup> The Ladye in the lay, like the Duchess in the frame narrative, has lost her husband. Unlike the Duchess, however, the Ladye is prevented by pride from grieving over her dead husband, Lord Walter (I, ix), for 'Vengeance, deep-brooding o'er the slain,' and 'burning pride and high disdain/Forbade the rising tear to flow'. It also stops her from giving her blessing to her daughter's love for Henry, Lord Cranstoun, whose family was at feud with the Scotts. This pride is an important running theme in the poem, and is strongly intertwined with the other themes of the three-stranded plot. The resolution of all the tensions and struggles the poem portrays seems to be closely interrelated with pride too. It is only when pride 'be quelled,' that love can live, and peace prevail.

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<sup>41</sup> Bainbridge, p. 134.

<sup>42</sup> J. H. Alexander notes that pride could be an 'admirable' trait, such as the case of the Duchess's pride in her son and the power of her allies. He later concludes that 'all pride is suspect, however admirable'. I choose in this chapter to treat pride as a human characteristic that is always negative and leads to irrational actions. J. H. Alexander, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel: Three Essays* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1978), pp. 5-9.

The disordered human relations introduced at the beginning of the first canto are reflected in the tempestuous weather described in I. xii-xiv. The 'heavy sound/That moans the mossy turrets round', the barking of the 'ban-dogs' and whooping of the 'startled owl' are mistakenly taken by the warriors at the tower to signify an approaching storm. It was not so: those foreboding noises were the sounds of the 'Spirit of the Flood' and the 'Spirit of the Fell' having a conversation. The River Spirit asks the Mountain Spirit to read the stars and see 'When shall cease these feudal jars?/What shall be the maiden's fate?/Who shall be the Maiden's mate? (I, xvi)' This succession of questions establishes the theme of love, part of the three-stranded plot of the poem. The Mountain Spirit replies,

Ill may I read their high decree!  
But no kind influence deign they shower  
On Teviot's tide and Branksome's tower  
Till pride be quell'd and love be free.

(I, xvii)

This answer establishes the importance of pride as a deterrent to love, stopping it from coming to fruition. Pride has to be conquered before normal human relations find their way back to the castle. This, however, is no easy task, and the proud Ladye, who could understand what the two spirits were saying, is not going to easily allow it.

The supernatural description preceding the conversation between the River Spirit and the Mountain Spirit is part of the then fashionable Gothic school of artistic representation. This taste is divided into two categories according to Chandler: 'early writers had tended to show the awe and sadness of the past and usually ended by moralizing over man's frailty,' whereas 'later authors [...] were more likely to use Gothic settings to provide the reader with a certain thrill of danger and excitement [...] By 1770 Gothic materials were not used to show the sadness of man's mortality

so much as the precariousness of his fate'.<sup>43</sup> Scott's employment of the two spirits is symbolic of an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty about the future both on the part of the Ladye and society as a whole because of the transitional period it was going through.

The introduction to the conversation between the two spirits, both of which are parts of nature, has more than one function. It not only echoes the atmosphere in the castle and, by extension, the whole Border society, full of death, anger, and fear, but it also introduces the supernatural theme of the three-stranded plot, which is further divided into the influences of magic and religion, and symbolized by the book of spells and Lord Cranstoun's goblin page, Gilpin Horner. The Ladye decides to use magic in order to put an end to the love affair between her daughter and Lord Cranstoun, a practice involving a dark force which no Christian should engage in. The Ladye, who has inherited some magical powers from her father, is the first character we encounter who possesses paranormal powers. 'A clerk of fame,' the father had 'learn'd the art that none may name,/In Padua, far beyond the sea' (I, xi). When he walked in 'St. Andrew's cloister'd hall,/His form no darkening shadow trac'd/Upon the sunny wall!'. He taught his daughter this art, which she mastered so well that 'to her bidding she could bow/The viewless forms of air' (I, xii). Her 'bower' is, moreover, 'guarded by word and by spell,/Deadly to hear, and deadly to tell' (I, i). This power allows the Ladye to understand the conversation between the two spirits which no other person present at the tower could, and triggers her summoning Deloraine to ask for the book of spells, the 'treasure of the tomb' which lay buried with the Wizard Michael Scott (I, xxii).<sup>44</sup> This renowned wizard was so powerful 'that

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<sup>43</sup> Chandler, pp. 318-319.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Scott was an alchemist and astrologer born in the late thirteenth century. He was the first prominent figure in the Scott family, and is taken by many to be its founder. The lack of certainty about the location of his burial place may have given Scott an opportunity to adapt his name to the purpose of

when, in Salamanca's cave,/Him listed his magic wand to wave,/The bells would ring in Notre Dame!' (II, xiii). Michael Scott is linked with Lord Henry's dwarf page. The nobleman first met this creature which was 'scarce an earthly man' when he, 'a-hunting rode/Through Reedsdale glens, but rarely trod,/He heard a voice cry, "Lost! lost! lost!"' (II, xxxi). To get rid of the elf who would not leave him, Lord Cranstoun rode 'five good miles,' but this did not work, as 'where he rode one mile, the Dwarf ran four,/And the Dwarf was first at the castle door'. This elf saved his master's life when they both went to 'Mary's Chapel on the Lowes' and word reached the Scotts that Henry was there. The rival clan gathered 'three hundred spears and three,' but when they reached the chapel they found it empty. The elf knew that they were on their way and warned his master, who fled before their arrival (II, xxxiii). After reading the spell in the mysterious book of spells the goblin starts using it irresponsibly and for his own evil ends. In doing so he 'represents supernatural power exercised without responsibility, out of sheer malice', as J. H. Alexander points out.<sup>45</sup> Horner's disappearance at the end of the poem could be read as punishment for his abuse of the special power he possessed, thus also indicating that, had the Ladye used the book against her foes, she would have probably faced a similarly fate. Horner appeared to be good to his master and cruel to everyone else. However, the minstrel expresses his doubts about that, as will be made clearer later. Another function of the conversation between the mountain and the river spirits is that it serves as an example of the way nature is employed to establish the supernatural theme and introduce certain traits in characters, in this case the Ladye's magic powers.

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the poem by bringing him to the sixteenth century and placing his tomb at Melrose Abbey. Some sources set Michael Scott's burial place to be in Italy, others say he returned to Scotland before his death and was actually buried in Melrose.

<sup>45</sup> J. H. Alexander, p. 105.



The journey of William of Deloraine, the mosstrooper sent by his Ladye to fetch the magic book from Melrose, is described in terms of the woods, mountains, rivers and places passed. He is so familiar with this terrain that 'Blindfold, he knew the paths to cross;/By wily turns, by desperate bounds,/Had baffled Percy's best blood-hounds' (I. xxi). It is wild country: when he comes to the River Aill his horse has to plunge in up to its neck to cross it (I.xxix). Some of the places passed have historical connections, and these are pointed out either by relating their history or by the telling of an anecdote about their residents. When Deloraine passes Halidon (I.xxx), site of a battle between the Carrs and the Scotts, for instance, he tells us about the battle in some detail. As this ride also shows, people in this rough country are defined by their family and place of residence, and families remember the history which gives them the right to the place where they live. This Border memory of the past, held orally in a basically non-literate society, no doubt enriches their culture, but also feeds their feuds.

Just before Deloraine reaches Branksome Tower on his way back from the Abbey, he comes face to face with Lord Henry who was meeting Margaret at a secret rendezvous near Branksome. This meeting is an example of how nature is used to reflect the general mood and relations between the characters in the poem. The landscape which was described as being so wild throughout Deloraine's journey to Melrose has now become full of 'hawthorn green' for the couple meeting 'under the hawthorn boughs' in the tower's garden (II. xxviii).<sup>46</sup> When the two warriors come face to face, 'Few were the words, and stern and high,/That mark'd the foemen's feudal hate;/For question fierce, and proud reply,/Gave signal soon of dire debate' (III, iv). The two men's pride and anger result in a fight. Cranstoun wounds

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<sup>46</sup> Alexander points out that 'it is the colour green, associated with the woods around Branksome where the lovers meet, that is the most prominent signal of love' (p. 11).

Deloraine, who falls to the ground with his horse. Telling his Page to tend the wound and return Deloraine to Branksome, Lord Henry makes his escape. Such a noble act was one of the positive sides of medieval culture, and it is through such actions that the poet tried to show how good codes of honour were bound to die away alongside the negative aspects of feudal society upon the disintegration of this system.

Deloraine fought Henry because he was the enemy. He was a member of the clan with which his Ladye is at war, and it was his absolute loyalty to her that motivated him to fight Cranstoun. Deloraine is portrayed as a trustworthy warrior throughout the poem, and although he is a moss-trooper who wreaks havoc across the borders, his loyalty to his Ladye could be an example for people to follow in rallying around their government, especially in times of war and conflict. Indeed Scott invites his readers not to judge Deloraine for his bad deeds; people, he believed, could only be evaluated in terms of their own society, and in his society Deloraine was ‘good at need’, brave, loyal, the most reliable warrior the Ladye could summon in order to send on the very sensitive mission of fetching the book of spells from Melrose. ‘In his world,’ Lincoln argues, ‘to drive prey and be outlawed by two monarchs does not signify a lack of probity or fealty: within his own sphere of interest Deloraine is exemplary [...] He is hardly identified as Scottish [...] He is a Scott rather than a Scot—his primary allegiance is to the Ladye of Branksome.’<sup>47</sup> This loyalty to a certain clan and enmity toward its opponents ‘shows a larger, national unity created ad hoc through such local “concrete” loyalties and enmities’. Deloraine thus represents the gap between modern and feudal perception, while simultaneously bridging this gap by bringing up the possibility of warring parties’ coming together against mutual threat.

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<sup>47</sup> Lincoln, p. 9.

The Page finds the book that Deloraine is carrying and reads ‘one short spell’ before it shuts fast. The spell enables him to create ‘delusion’. The Page returns the wounded Deloraine to Branksome, and on the way out takes off the child heir of Buccleuch. He abandons the child in the woods where he is found by a party of English huntsmen. That evening the beacons, through which news of invasion was spread through the Borders, are seen on the most prominent western hills. These fires warn of an English invasion from the west and prompt the Scots to prepare for battle. The Scots clans of the western Border, the Johnstones, Elliots and Armstrongs are first summoned (III, xxvii). Eventually the beacons take the news of invasion to Edinburgh (III, xxix). The use of the hills to send the news, and the summoning of the Borderers by name and place, further show how closely these Borderers live with their natural setting. These war preparations, which can only mean death and destruction, and which will plant the seeds for further acts of vengeance in the future, prompt the aged minstrel to break his narrative and reflect on human life and his personal grief. The death of his own son in battle, the bard tells his audience, has made him ponder the futility of violence and bloodshed. Human beings are very different from nature: they cannot forget their sorrows and move on. The human heart keeps grieving and engaging with the past, and scars can never be healed again, which means that peace is very unlikely to be found once blood has been spilled. By the employment of powerful natural imagery, the minstrel shows the contrast between human beings and nature which constantly moves forward in an everlasting act of renewal,

Sweet Teviot! On thy silver tide

The glaring bale-fires blaze no more;

[...]

Where’er thou wind’st, by dale or hill,

All, all is peaceful, all is still,  
 As if thy waves, since Time was born ,  
 Since first they rolled upon the Tweed,  
 Had only heard the shepherd's reed,  
 Nor started at the bugle-horn.  
 Unlike the tide of human time,—  
 Which, though it change in ceaseless flow,  
 Retains each grief, retains each crime  
 Its earliest course was doom'd to know;  
 And, darker as it downward bears,  
 Is stained with past and present tears.

(IV, i)

Scott seems to be suggesting that if we want the 'tide of human time' to cease to look back and get constantly 'stained with past and present tears' we need to learn from the example of nature. Humankind needs to seize the present moment for it is constantly yielding the future, while at the same time momentarily turning into the past. This is where people need to focus their attention – on turning the present into a more peaceful memory for them to remember later, thus also making the future a happier time for everyone.

In the bard's tale, however, war was still the situation on the ground. It has now become apparent that the Scots are facing a serious invasion, 'a Warden-Raid' (IV, iv),<sup>48</sup> led by the Wardens of the English Western Marches, Lord Dacre and Lord William Howard. As warden raids were more serious than informal invasions carried out by cattle-raiders or the like, tension in Branksome was running high. When the

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<sup>48</sup> Wardens were appointed in the Border by both the English and Scottish kings—they were local noblemen given responsibility for keeping order in terrain where there was no other police-force. For a full list of wardens in the Borders between 1558-1603 see D. L. W. Tough, *The Last Years of A Frontier* (Alnwick: Sandhill Press Ltd., 1987).

invading English troops reach the castle, there is a parley. The Ladye's Seneschal, or chief adviser, offers the English leaders the chance to retreat peacefully, but threatens revenge if they do any harm (IV, xxii). Howard, however, brings forth the child, the Ladye's son. He offers her terms: she is to deliver Deloraine to the English because of an attack he made on the family of Richard Musgrave; and since she is 'a lone and widowed Dame' (IV, xx) she is to accept two hundred English soldiers in her house. If she refuses her son will be delivered to the English king in London. The Ladye, 'in dauntless mood' (IV, xxv) refuses to hand over Deloraine but suggests that he fight Musgrave in single combat 'for his honour's sake'. As to her child, 'God be his aid, and God be mine'. Before they reply the English hear that the Scots expect reinforcements. Dacre's response to this news is fight now, before these additional forces arrive. Howard argues for accepting the Ladye's suggestion of single combat between Deloraine and Musgrave, because at worst it would mean only one warrior lost.

The advice Lord Howard gives Dacre is rational and far-sighted. He does not seem to be driven by anger or pride, and realizes that strong passions can only breed further violence and bloodshed. Howard saw the necessity for self-restraint when all around him were still following the dictates of their pride. When the Ladye sees the big number of Scottish fighters come to her aid, for example, 'high her heart of pride arose' (IV, xiii). And when she states her own terms to the invading army, she 'proud [...] look'd round, applause to claim' (IV, xxvii). The English attacker, Lord Dacre, responds haughtily to the news that large Scottish reinforcement is on its way, 'and let them come!' he says defiantly, 'For soon my crest, my father's pride,/That swept the shores of Judah's sea,/And waved in gales of Galilee,/[...] shall mock the rescue's lingering aid' (IV, xxix). At such a time a calmer and more rational action is called

for, one which will save lives and take a step, no matter how small, toward establishing peace.

At this point the minstrel once more breaks off his narrative and offers his own insight into the events. He tells his audience a story which echoes incidents from his lay, especially the Borderers' tendency to respond to supposed injury with violence. This, he proves, is not a trait of warriors only- minstrels share it too. The minstrel's diversion tells how the harper who taught him to play quarrelled with another bard, killed him, and was put to death for the murder. The minstrel himself had his own feuding passions, and his story resembles that of the Borderers he sings about: 'I, alas!' he exclaims, 'survive alone,/To muse o'er rivalries of yore,/And grieve that I shall hear no more/The strains, with envy heard before' (IV, xxxv). Just like the Borderers too, the old minstrel is the last of his kind, and all he represented will die out with his passing. But when a poet dies, he does not die alone – all the people whose lives he celebrated in his poetry, and who would have been long forgotten had it not been for his poetry, die with him 'a second death' (V, ii). Poets, the minstrel says, worship nature, and their close affinity with it is lamented upon their death for they have long sung nature's praises and kept her alive in song and in people's hearts. Nature's grief is not expressed in words as nature is 'Mute' (V, i). It is through sounds and sights that we can feel its pain, thus 'tall cliff and cavern lone' mourn the poet by 'mak[ing] moan,' while 'mountains weep in crystal rill;/That flowers in tears of balm distil,' and 'breezes sigh/And oaks, in deeper groan, reply' (IV, i). This is reminiscent of Wordsworth's 'Yarrow Revisited', to be discussed in the last chapter, where Wordsworth shares Scott's belief that poets keep nature alive through their song,

And what, for this frail world, were all  
 That mortals do or suffer,  
 Did no responsive harp, no pen,  
 Memorial tribute offer?  
 Yea, what were mighty Nature's self?  
 Her features, could they win us,  
 Unhelped by the poetic voice  
 That hourly speaks within us?<sup>49</sup>

Once it has been agreed that a pitched battle between the Scots and English will be replaced by single combat, to take place the following day, the Ladye asks Howard and Dacre into Branksome Hall. Howard accepts the invitation, but 'angry Dacre' refuses (V, v). The Borderers of both sides 'sate them mingled down,/Without a threat, without a frown,/As brethren meet in foreign land' (V,vi). A lot of them recognized each other as old friends, and all 'partook of social cheer' and played football. Despite this friendly atmosphere Scott reminds his readers that 'had bugles blown,/Or sign of war been seen,/Those bands so fair together rang'd,/Those hands, so frankly interchang'd,/Had dyed with gore the green' (V, vii). The fight takes place the following morning and Musgrave is defeated. It turns out that in the encounter the wounded Deloraine had been replaced by Cranstoun, whose Page's spell and his heavy armour prevent his being recognized. This is one of the few instances in the poem in which magic is used to serve a higher aim and bring forth future unity and peace.<sup>50</sup> After this victory the child is returned to the Ladye, who agrees to Cranstoun's marrying Margaret and the end of their feud. In doing so she thinks back to the Mountain Spirit's Prophecy in Canto I, acknowledging that 'pride is quell'd,

<sup>49</sup> *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 'Yarrow Revisited', lines 81-88), p. 367.

<sup>50</sup> Another example of this is when the Ladye uses her special powers to cure the wounded Deloraine who was carried back to the tower by Gilpin Horner.

and love is free' (V, xxvi). When Deloraine, who had up till then been recuperating in the castle, hears what has happened, he pays a noble tribute to Musgrave as an enemy, but a worthy one and to be lamented as such. He acknowledges the fact that he could never 'find a nobler foe,' adding that he would 'give the lands of Deloraine,/Dark Musgrave were alive again' (V, xxix). This is yet another magnanimous sentiment exhibited by members of the medieval Border society. It is true that such a gesture does not lessen the bloodshed, but it lifts it above absolute brutality.

It was true love that brought peace to the warring sides. Henry's willingness to sacrifice his own life for the woman he loves put an end to what would have otherwise been a painful war. This love is described in the poem in ideal terms: it is self-effacing and deep. Some knights who were present on the night of the battle were interested in Margaret and wanted to marry her, but their motivation was not as pure as Henry's: they were either enchanted by her beauty or wanted to win 'many a bold ally' (V, x). It was very unlikely that any of them would have put his life on the line for her like Henry did, for that requires true feelings which are not dictated by appearances and the quest for social status and power. Margaret would not have approved of any of those warriors either: she has avowed in front of her lover that she 'would die a maid' unless 'Henry of Cranstoun, and only he,/Margaret of Branksome's choice should be' (II, xxxi). Before the combat begins the dwarf Page arranges for his master to meet Margaret in her room. Though he comes under disguise Margaret immediately recognizes him, for 'O! what magic's quaint disguise/Could blind fair Margaret's azure eyes!' (V, xii). The minstrel wonders whether this was a set up by the mischievous creature so that if 'Their erring passion [had] wrought/Sorrow, and sin, and shame' it would have meant Henry dead and Margaret disgraced (V, xiii). The bard shakes his doubts off, stating that the goblin



could never understand the pure nature of true love which is from God and is not based on mere physical desire,

True love's the gift which God has given  
To man alone beneath the heaven:  
It is not fantasy's hot fire,  
Whose wishes, soon as granted, fly;  
It liveth not in fierce desire,  
With dead desire it doth not die;  
It is the secret sympathy,  
The silver link, the silken tie,  
Which heart to heart, and mind to mind,  
In body and in soul can bind.

(V, xiii)

A 'spousal' ceremony for Margaret and Henry takes place after the duel. In the feast which follows the Page disrupts the participants with mischievous tricks, and the mood begins to look threatening. To divert people's attention the Ladye asks minstrels to sing, and there follow three songs, all tragic. The first, sung by Albert Græme from the Borders, is the tale of an English lady who wanted to marry a Scots knight and was poisoned by her own brother. The next lay is sung by Howard's English minstrel, and is a tragic story of his relation, the Earl of Surrey, a poet put to death by Henry VIII. The third is sung by a minstrel from the far north of Scotland, and is a tale of a young woman drowned in crossing the Firth of Forth to meet her lover. These three songs which come from Scotland, England, and the Borders unite the two warring countries and highlight the possibility of peace and co-existence. In their treatment of the ideas of love and death they, furthermore, reinforce the notion that love transcends the possibility of pain and death and always emerges triumphant

at the end, even if the people concerned are no longer together in the physical sense. The ballads may also be read, I suggest, as a reminder that the human condition is one and the same wherever one comes from. All human beings experience the same feelings and emotions: their sadness and happiness feel the same even though their circumstances may differ, and they all experience love, pain and separation at one point or another in their lives. These realizations serve to bring people closer together as they open their eyes to the fact that there is much more in common among human beings than their numerous differences might suggest.

As the songs end there is a supernatural intervention. The guests at the party report how 'A wondrous shade involv'd them all' that 'Each one could scarce his neighbour's face,/Could scarce his own stretched hand behold' (VI, xxiv). Next there was lightning and a loud noise, and 'When ended was the dreadful roar,/The elfish dwarf was seen no more!' (VI, xxv). This strange incident was interpreted differently by different people. Deloraine says that he was certain the page was claimed by the wizard Michael Scott himself. All present are shaken by this mysterious occurrence and decide to go on a pilgrimage to Melrose Abbey 'for the sake/Of Michael's restless sprite'. There different people called on their different saints in prayer, but everyone prayed to the same God. The Ladye decided to renounce black magic for good (VI, xxvii). Now that all the negative feelings such as enmity, anger and revenge have been 'quelled' and love has been set free, pride seemed to have also subsided. The minstrel describes how they now have 'No lordly look, nor martial stride' because 'Gone was their glory, sunk their pride,/Forgotten their renown' (VI, xxix). This is one of many references in the poem to the fact that the Border culture is dying out.

The renunciation of the lady's supernatural powers which could also be taken as symbolic of fear and uncertainty, as already stated, indicates that the reconciliation between the opposing parties and clans has paved the way for a more stable society, which promises everyone of a better future. This form of supernatural power is now replaced by another, different one: religion.

Religion appears to have no real influence on Borderers' lives in *The Lay*. The church only resumes its role as a centre of peace and worship when all parties put their differences aside and love is established anew. Prior to that, people have been portrayed as using religion to their own advantage. They only go to church for selfish reasons, such as asking for forgiveness for a murder or theft they have committed earlier. A respected warrior such as William of Deloraine tells the priest at Melrose Abbey, where he went on the command of his Ladye, 'Prayer know I hardly one;/For mass or prayer can I rarely tarry,/Save to patter an Ave Mary,/When I ride on a Border foray' (II, vi). A knight who has often been involved in battle, Deloraine has 'neither known remorse nor awe' for the people he has killed. When he meets Lord Henry the moss-trooper 'nor sigh'd nor pray'd,/Nor saint, nor ladye, called to aid' (III, v). When word reaches the Scotts that Henry is at 'Mary's Chapel of the Lowes' they go after him in order to kill him. However, they do not find him there and consequently 'burn [...] the chapel for very rage' with no regard to its holy status as a house of God (II, xxxiii). This lack of religious sentiment is probably due to the fact that love, in all its shapes and forms, is not allowed to flourish when negative feelings such as hatred and fear prevail. Lord Henry, who is a character that believes in the power of love, states that love is inseparable from religion, that God is love, and that we block it from our lives by choosing not to see it even though it is omnipresent: 'In peace, Love tunes the shepherd's reed;/In war, he mounts the warrior's steed/[...] For

love is heaven, and heaven is love' (III, ii). Before Henry and Deloraine fight, nevertheless, Henry 'sigh'd a sigh, and pray'd a prayer:/The prayer was to his patron saint,/The sigh was to his ladye fair' (III, v). And when he defeats his rival and wounds him, he bids his Page 'stanch the wound,/And there beside the warrior stay,/And tend him in his doubtful state,' as already mentioned (III, xii). The motivation behind his action was that 'His noble mind was inly moved/For the kinsman of the maid he loved' (III, vii).

Ironically, the war between the English and the Scots is fought in the name of God in yet another selective use – or abuse – of religion. When the Ladye refuses the terms of the English invaders and it becomes almost certain that war is going to take place, 'To heaven the Border slogan rung,/“St. Mary for the young Buccleuch!”' (IV, xxvii). Bloodshed on the English side is also done under God's name: Lord Dacre boasts that his father was a part of the Crusades, saying that the same pride which drove the father to do what he did then will drive him personally to fiercely fight his Scottish enemies (IV, xxix). In characters such as Henry, however, it is apparent that the God the poem is inviting readers to worship is not a God of war and destruction, but of love and peace.

Some readers have suggested that Scott's portrayal of the Catholic church is usually unfavourable: that it is used by Scott as a distinct 'other' different from the current form of Protestant belief, and is therefore an apt 'object of blame'.<sup>51</sup> Melrose Abbey, for example, is portrayed as 'a source of villainy and horror,'<sup>52</sup> a church 'guarding a supernaturally evil secret' represented by the magic book of spells.<sup>53</sup> Despite this negative portrayal, Chandler claims that Scott actually 'admired the

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 183.

<sup>52</sup> Chandler, p. 322.

<sup>53</sup> Gamer, p. 183.

medieval church', but he 'followed the prejudices and practices of most novelists of his time in ascribing to it all sorts of evil practices'.<sup>54</sup>

The *Lay*'s multi-faceted plot is complex and far-reaching, as this section has tried to show through a summary of the main parts of the poem where its various themes are most clearly expressed. Because the poet decided to present those themes within the framework of Border history, the discussion in this section has been more associated with place than nature, although references to nature have been also highlighted. Such passages linked to nature demonstrate that the hypothesis laid out at the beginning of the thesis is valid: nature was indeed often regarded as an external force that Scott used to provide the background for his themes, propel the action forward, or highlight certain qualities of his characters. Nature in *The Lay* is not treated as an individual phenomenon as in *The Prelude*. The characters in *The Lay* do not have revelations through nature similar to those experienced by Wordsworth's characters, nor has any one of them been raised by nature's dual agency of love and fear working on the mind and heart of the child to prepare him for his life's mission. Generally speaking, nature in *The Lay* is a more collective, social phenomenon: a conveyor of Border tradition and history. However, Scott's response to nature is by no means confined to those instances in which nature and history overlap. This social identity with which Scott imbues nature in his poem, seemingly stripping his characters of the depth of connection with nature felt by Wordsworth's characters, is not always the case. As an earlier quote shows, the impressive natural features of the Border landscape were a source of awe for Scott, who recorded in his *Memoirs* the sense of 'intense impression of reverence' those natural elements of the landscape

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<sup>54</sup> Chandler, p. 322.

inspired in him.<sup>55</sup> Another passage from *The Lay* which, to a degree, qualifies the claim made at the beginning of the thesis is the contrast between nature and human life made by the minstrel in the opening stanza of Canto IV. This contrast contradicts the claim that nature has always been considered by Scott to be associated with human history. The old bard reflects on the river Teviot in the past when its shores bore ‘glaring bale-fires’ and ‘steel-clad warriors’ and the present when ‘all is peaceful, all is still’. This is, however, ‘Unlike the tide of human time’ which remembers griefs of the past – one of which turns out to be the death of the Minstrel’s son.

The following section is concerned with three places described in those poems by Scott and Wordsworth falling within the scope of this thesis. The three abbeys have been chosen because each one of them is a place which has once functioned as a house of God. The three abbeys have since been destroyed and assimilated into their natural surroundings, of which they now form a part, thus making them what could be termed spots of nature.

### **The Three Abbeys: Furness, Melrose, and Tintern, A Comparison**

Abbeys feature in the poetry of Scott and Wordsworth both as distinct buildings or ruins to be admired in their own right, and as symbols through which the poet tries to convey a certain theme. This section examines some of the ways in which three abbeys have been appropriated by the two poets.

During the Reformation in the sixteenth century the monasteries and convents of England were destroyed by Henry VIII. The Act of Suppression was passed in 1536, and the process which has come to be known as the Dissolution of the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

Monasteries took place between 1536 and 1540. The monasteries were closed down and the monks and nuns dispersed. Most of the buildings were left roofless – although the destruction was not equally great in each place. In many places the local people would gradually take the stones for buildings of their own. Some of the smaller buildings disappeared entirely; others still stand as ruins in the landscape. No-one seems to have bothered much about them until the end of the eighteenth century when people came to regret the actions which left these ruins, to prevent further damage, and to stress their beauty and the quiet peacefulness of their setting.

Furness Abbey was one of the larger Abbeys. It was in a remote place near Barrow-in-Furness, in the far south-west of Cumbria, and had quite a powerful position in that part of the county as is clear from Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*.<sup>56</sup> It was suppressed in 1537.

Wordsworth describes visiting the abbey in *The Prelude* in Books II and X. The first of these accounts is about the adult poet describing a youthful experience he had while still a schoolboy: Wordsworth and his friends hired horses to ride to the abbey. The ruins are described as a 'mouldering pile' beside 'living trees' – implying that nature is still living, although the Abbey moulders.<sup>57</sup> Having described the general decay of the abbey, Wordsworth exclaims that it is 'a holy Scene', which shows him recalling the original purpose of the building. He could also have meant that the trees alongside the ruined church make up a holy scene through which we reflect on life, its brevity, and the fact that nature always outlives human beings and their structures. This idea is further echoed in the singing of a wren hidden somewhere near the ruins (125-133). The solitary bird is singing in a building which would have had a monastic choir, and despite the damage inflicted upon the building

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<sup>56</sup> *Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes*, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 54-56.

<sup>57</sup> *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, 'The Prelude' (1805), Book II, lines 112-13.

and the change which has taken place in it, the bird's song is still the same and will forever be. The linking of birds and monastic ruins was not new to Wordsworth. It is particularly famous from Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 in which he writes about the transient nature of human life: he describes 'bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang'. Although the poet is apparently describing trees in autumn, this line is usually assumed to be also referring to the ruins in which monastic choirs recently sang before they were destroyed.<sup>58</sup>

When Wordsworth and his friends remount their horses to set off for home, their ride is described in boyish terms: they ride 'in uncouth race', 'in wantonness of heart', as they 'scampered homeward' (II, 124, 137-138). These terms seem to suggest that the adult poet is acknowledging that the boys' behaviour was not respectful of the ruins, although typical of young boys. There is sadness in the ruins which nature shares in: 'sobblings of the place,/And respirations, from the roofless walls/The shuddering ivy dripped large drops' (129-31). Nature is also significantly invoked at the close of this episode when Wordsworth, in characteristic fashion, calls on 'ye Rocks and Streams,/And that still Spirit of the evening air!', telling those natural elements that 'Even in this joyous time [he] still felt/[their] presence' (138-41).

The second reference to Furness Abbey in *The Prelude* comes immediately after the account of the death of Robespierre, and is a memory of the previous episode. Having commented on the appalling bloodshed Robespierre caused in France, and having expressed the hope that more peaceful times would now come, Wordsworth remembers his earlier visit to the abbey ruins. There are lessons to be learnt from the state the abbey is in now, as well as hope to be felt for the future: the lines seem to be suggesting that the fame and influence the abbey once enjoyed was

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<sup>58</sup> *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997), p. 257.



short-lived, and eventually came to an inevitable end; yet the place is now one of peace, quiet and contemplation despite the sad destruction it was subjected to two centuries before. Consolation is to be found in this observation, which means that the events in France and all their violent and tragic repercussions are also destined to die down and come to an end.

Melrose Abbey was founded in the twelfth century, and the building was extended in the fifteenth century. Scottish monasteries did not suffer at the Reformation in the same way as English ones because Henry VIII was not king of Scotland. The Scottish Reformation was slightly later than that in England, and is usually dated to 1560. Scottish monasteries were not so systematically destroyed as English ones: they were abandoned and neglected, causing them to fall into ruin of their own accord. The case of Melrose is rather different as it was badly damaged even before the Reformation in Scotland took place.

In 1542 the Scottish King, James V, died, leaving as his heir only an infant daughter, later known as Mary Queen of Scots (1542-87). In that situation Scotland was vulnerable and English armies invaded southern Scotland. In particular an invasion led by the Earl of Hertford in 1545 did a lot of damage to Melrose Abbey. One of the reasons for this invasion was that Henry VIII wanted to marry the young Queen of Scots to his own son, which the Scots opposed. Further damage and neglect followed after the Reformation.

Of the three Abbeys discussed in this section, Melrose is the only one which has been described by the poet both before and after its destruction. Scott describes the Abbey in three places in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. There is first the description of the fully functioning abbey where William of Deloraine is sent to fetch the magic book, which is probably going to be used against his clan's enemies. The book, which

it is against the teachings of Christianity to use, is ironically buried in the Catholic church. Deloraine reaches the place at midnight, and the following scene is set inside the Abbey when all is quiet after the last service of the day. The priest warns Deloraine against using the volume, telling him how he himself has been in repentance for sixty years for having read it (II, v). Deloraine dismisses this, telling the priest that he knows no prayers nor feels remorse for what he has done in his life. This scene is Gothic in more than one sense: the Abbey is Gothic, or medieval, in style, and is associated in the poem with disturbing and supernatural detail. For example, upon his leaving the Abbey Deloraine hears a lot of laughing sounds and sees shadows running in the dark (II, xxii). When the book is taken out of the tomb of the wizard Michael Scott, Deloraine thinks he saw the dead man frown.

The description of the Abbey also contains some references to nature. In Canto II, viii, we are told that the herbs and flowers in the cloister garden are reproduced in the stonework of the Abbey. In II, xi there is a description of the East Window which talks of 'foliated tracery', and also envisages the delicate arches as having been made of branches of poplar and willow which was then turned into stone, reflecting a belief current in Scott's time that it was wooden buildings made of tall branches tied at the top which inspired the pointed arch typical of Gothic architecture.

The Abbey appears in a different light in the opening passage to Canto II. It is now introduced in its later, ruined state, and the passage describing it is presumably spoken by the minstrel, since it is the pattern for the minstrel to open and close each canto throughout the poem. At the end of the seventeenth century, when the minstrel was telling the ladies his story, the Abbey was a ruin. This passage, however, could also be taken as a direct address by Scott because the sensitivity to the ruin, its beauty

and its sad atmosphere, are more typical of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the poet was composing his *Lay*.

The minstrel invites the reader to visit Melrose by moonlight, when the ruins described could be seen in terms of stonework in black, white and silver. This unusual request has likely to do with the fact that night is more suited to the character of the scene, 'sad and fair.' The sounds would not be of a choir – or even frightening noises and laughter coming from the dark corners of the abbey garden – but of 'the distant Tweed [...] heard to rave' and the owl hooting over a grave. There is a reminder that this was once a religious building in line 11: 'the scrolls that teach thee to live and die'. These scrolls are a reminder of the brevity of human life, which is contrasted with the perpetual nature of the Tweed, and of the eternal song of the owl, tellingly pictured as singing over a grave in the abbey's churchyard. Having completed the visit, the impact on the viewer/reader is divided between the sadness and the beauty of the scene (II, i).

The Abbey makes its last appearance in the *Lay* at the very end, and is described again in its fully functioning state. The Scots and English decide they want to say a prayer for the rest of the soul of Michael Scott. The Abbey is now a place of reconciliation and harmony where people come together in peace. It has no supernatural associations with magic or superstition any longer, especially after the Ladye decides to give up magic. This has been, of course, brought about by the love between Henry and Margaret, indicating that a true knowledge of God can only be reached through the power of true love, and that love for God is part and parcel of love for another human being. It is an elegiac ending to the poem as Scott seems to lament the fact that the fighting culture of the borders will disappear altogether as we move forward from the sixteenth century.

Tintern Abbey, which features in the title of one of Wordsworth's most famous poems, is not mentioned or described beyond the title line. What Wordsworth describes in the title is specific, he gives details of his distance from the Abbey, the reason he was there, and the exact date of the visit: 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798.'<sup>59</sup> The poet then moves from a passing description of nature in the Wye valley to reflecting on the course of his own life in particular and the human condition in general. He had no reason to assume that his readers would not recognize Tintern Abbey: he knew that most of them would have an idea about it, chiefly due to the popularity of William Gilpin's book on his travels.

Tintern Abbey had become especially famous through Gilpin's description of it. The promoter of the idea of the 'picturesque' in landscape, Gilpin advocated the notion of looking at landscape in terms of whether it lends itself to being the subject of a painting, or a picture, as has already been pointed out in the Introduction. Gilpin writes about the ruins of the Abbey in his *Observations on the River Wye and several parts of South Wales* (1782). This 'enchanted piece of ruin,' he observes, 'nature has made [...] now her own.'<sup>60</sup> He does not seem to admire the monks, and shows little regret that the Abbey was destroyed: he even claims that 'more picturesque it certainly would have been if the area, unadorned, had been left with all its rough fragments of ruin scattered round'. Gilpin is concerned with the present, and the pleasure of visiting the place, rather than of reminiscing on the past.<sup>61</sup> He describes

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<sup>59</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Works*, p. 131.

<sup>60</sup> William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye and several parts of South Wales* (1782). ECCO, <http://www.jiscdigitalbooks.ac.uk/SearchResults.aspx> accessed august 23 2011, p. 48.

<sup>61</sup> Gilpin also describes the vagrants and poor living on the banks of the Wye River, and the iron industry up the stream, which Wordsworth famously provides no reference to in his poem. This has triggered a series of New Historicist studies in the 1980s attempting to read 'Tintern Abbey' in the light of its socio-economic context. Most influential among these studies is perhaps Marjorie Levinson's *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

‘the immediate environs around the abbey’ as being ‘a solitary, tranquil scene’.<sup>62</sup>

Wordsworth may have been building on this fact when placing the Abbey in the background of his poem. It is a place of peace and contemplation, which adds to the reflective vein of the poem. The Abbey has ceased to exist as a functioning place of worship, and now stands as a ruin blended into nature with overgrown walls and windows and the earth as its floors. It has gone back to nature’s lap in the same way people reunite with the earth when their worldly existence ceases to be.

‘Tintern Abbey’ revolves around maturity and reconciliation - coming to terms with the process of loss and gain by which we learn about ourselves and our place in the world. As we grow older, Wordsworth believes, we lose something we have had all along as children. We are no longer capable of experiencing rapture in nature or connecting spontaneously with it. This, however, is made up for by the conscious realization of the divine element running through all creation, including ourselves. Our unconscious link with God as children is lost forever, but this is no reason to feel sad as there is ‘abundant recompense’ for this later on in life (l. 89). The abbey could be seen as a reflection of this process of loss and gain inevitable in life: it had to go through a violent stage of destruction and plundering before it could become the peaceful site it is now, inviting contemplation and offering a link between the world of the divine and the natural world.

Wordsworth’s presentation of the two abbeys reinforces the belief that nature, as seen through their depiction in *The Prelude* and ‘Tintern Abbey’, was often an internal force for Wordsworth, one which the individual draws on and communes with in order to grow. This personal growth can then lead to a more social sense of

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Levinson argues that ‘Tintern Abbey’ yields itself fully to a reading which takes into account the context of the Wye Valley and Wordsworth’s own thought.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

understanding and unity when one gets older and becomes able to hear the ‘still, sad music of humanity’. This process of change and growth is a tough one: like ruined abbeys which have finally returned to the bosom of the earth in a long process of assimilation, man’s reunion with the spirit that pervades humanity as well as all life has to go through a difficult process of self-realization through suffering. Though Scott also views Melrose as a spot from which one can learn about life, especially through references and comparisons made between man-made structures and nature, the process of learning takes on a more collective form for him, and is usually conducted with minimal internal interference from nature: it is through the combined experiences of the Ladye’s household and clan in general that the realizations arrived at by the end of the poem are made. It was through the relationships the different characters in *The Lay* had with each other, such as Henry’s love for Margaret, that the different interlocking themes were resolved at the end of the poem. No character in *The Lay* experienced a revelation in nature akin to those experienced in Wordsworth’s poetry, nor did any of them feel a presence filling the air and permeating the rocks and rivers like that felt by Wordsworth while visiting Furness Abbey.

## Chapter 4

### An Excursion in Nature

#### Introduction to *The Excursion*

*The Excursion* was first envisioned as constituting part of *The Recluse*, the epic poem which came about as an idea in Coleridge's mind. Wordsworth wrote a lot of poetry which he intended for his grand *Recluse*, but he never published a poem under that title. He did, however, decide to publish one part of it in 1814: *The Excursion*, and it was this decision that marked the end of the entire project. When Coleridge, the godfather of *The Recluse* scheme which Wordsworth enthusiastically took up in 1798, read *The Excursion*, he knew that his idea was never going to come to fruition. Wordsworth's disillusionment with the joint scheme, however, had to wait until March 30, 1815, the day he received Coleridge's critique of the published poem.

The story of how *The Recluse* was conceived is well known and need not be elaborated at great length here: Coleridge came to highly value Wordsworth's poetic genius, which he also influenced to a large extent, during the *annus mirabilis*, as the year 1798 is sometimes referred to. This admiration, which I have already referred to in Chapter 2, is reflected in Coleridge's correspondence. He writes about Wordsworth passionately to friends, describing him as 'a great man,'<sup>1</sup> 'the Giant Wordsworth—God love him!'<sup>2</sup> 'a very great man—the only man, to whom *at all times & in all modes of excellence* I feel myself inferior.'<sup>3</sup> This awe in which Coleridge held Wordsworth's talent manifested itself in the fact that he communicated to him his plans for a poem of unprecedented proportions. Coleridge felt that his friend was capable of perfectly

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<sup>1</sup> Letter quoted in Gill, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

expressing his own themes and ideas at a time he felt he had to write, but was unable to, as I have pointed out in Chapter 2.<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth agreed to take on the poem which was meant to serve all humanity, and Coleridge supplied the plan. Twenty years had to be dedicated to composition,

Ten to collect materials and warm my mind with universal science. I would be a tolerable Mathematician, I would thoroughly know Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Optics, and Astronomy, Botany, Metallurgy, Fossilism, Chemistry, Geology, Anatomy, Medicine—then the *mind of man*—then the *minds of men*—in all Travels, Voyages and Histories. So I would spend ten years—the next five to the composition of the poem—and the five last to the correction of it.<sup>5</sup>

Wordsworth's own take on this plan was that the poem ought 'to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society.'<sup>6</sup> This was also reflected in the title he chose, *The Recluse: or, Views of Nature, Man, and Society*.<sup>7</sup> The poem was conceived of as containing *The Prelude* for its introductory part or the 'ante-chapel' of the 'gothic Church' structure Wordsworth envisaged for *The Recluse*. *Home at Grasmere* and 'The Tuft of Primroses' were to constitute Part I; *The Excursion*, Part II, whereas Part III remained unwritten.<sup>8</sup> *The Excursion* was the only part of this poem Wordsworth felt was completed to a satisfactory level and could stand on its own, so he went ahead and published it.

*The Excursion* fell short of the expectations of the man who mattered most.

When Coleridge's response to it reached Wordsworth, it was clear to him that 'he

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the reasons Coleridge felt unable to deliver on his plan see Gill, William Wordsworth: a Life, pp. 142–144. I also briefly refer to these reasons in note 17 to Chapter II.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Barker, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to James Tobin, March 6 1798, quoted in Gill, p. 144.

<sup>7</sup> Gill, William Wordsworth: a Life, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> For a list of composition dates for the component parts of *The Recluse* see Kenneth R. Johnston, *Wordsworth and The Recluse* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984), p. xvii.



could never have expounded Coleridge's philosophic system and he could not now.'<sup>9</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the project did not materialize when we read Coleridge's detailed response to *The Excursion*,

I supposed you first to have meditated the faculties of Man in the abstract, in their correspondence with his Sphere of action, and first, in the Feeling, Touch, and Taste, then in the Eye, & last in the Ear, to have laid a solid and immovable foundation for the Edifice by removing the sandy Sophisms of Locke and the Mechanic Dogmatists, and demonstrating that the senses were living growths and developments of the Mind Spirit in a much juster as well as higher sense, than the mind can be said to be formed by the Senses—. Next, I understood that you would take the Human Race in the concrete, have exploded the absurd notion of Pope's Essay on Man, Darwin, and all the countless Believers—even (strange to say) among Xtians of Man's having progressed from an Ouran Outang state [...] to have affirmed a Fall in some sense [...] to point out however a manifest Scheme of Redemption from this Slavery, of Reconciliation from this Enmity with Nature [...]. In short, Facts elevated into Theory—Theory into Laws—& Laws into living & intelligent Powers—true Idealism necessarily perfecting itself in Realism, & Realism refining itself into Idealism.<sup>10</sup>

The Wordsworthian–Coleridgean dream poem thus came to an end both 'as a notion,' and 'even as an idea,' in 1815. Gill very succinctly summarizes the sad story of the short life of *The Recluse*, a poem 'conceived at Alfoxden in the exhilaration of talk, poetry, and mutual admiration. Uncertain as to his direction six years later, Wordsworth had exhorted Coleridge to send his "notes for the Recluse. I cannot say how much importance I attach to this." Now, another decade on, Coleridge at last sent them—and they ended the long illusion'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gill, *William Wordsworth: a Life*. p. 311.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Wordsworth, March 30, 1815. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–1971), IV, 574–5.

<sup>11</sup> Gill, *William Wordsworth: a Life*, p. 311.

Wordsworth wrote some poetry toward *The Recluse* after 1815, but he probably knew that the poem was never going to be finished. This, Gill points out, is due to several factors, including the nature of the plan itself, which was ‘so undefined’ and closer to ‘an ambition’ than a specific poetic project. Another important factor was that Coleridge has mistaken the nature of Wordsworth’s talent. His poem was meant to ‘deliver upon authority a system of philosophy’, but Wordsworth had no such system, and he usually wrote a poetry ‘of questioning, of gleams, flashes, intimations, visionary moments’ not of authoritative, systematic philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

Coleridge’s evaluation of the poem was not all negative: in fact, he made some very favourable remarks about it, but they could hardly have lessened Wordsworth’s sense of failure and sadness at the collapse of so great an ambition. Coleridge, for example, pointed out, ‘proofs meet me in every part of *The Excursion* that the poet’s genius has not flagged’, adding that ‘one half of the number of its beauties would make all the beauties of all his contemporary poets collectively mount to the balance’.<sup>13</sup> Keats was equally as generous, famously stating in a letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon, ‘I am convinced that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age—The Excursion Your Pictures, and Hazlitt’s depth of Taste.’<sup>14</sup> Hazlitt’s deep taste saw him praise the poem as a work which ‘has seldom been surpassed’ in its ‘power of intellect, in lofty conception, in the depth of feeling, at once simple and sublime, which pervades every part of it, and which gives to every object an almost preternatural and preterhuman interest’.<sup>15</sup> It was Francis Jeffrey’s famous review that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 145–146.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Lady Beaumont, 3 April 1815. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, IV, 564.

<sup>14</sup> *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958) I: 203.

<sup>15</sup> *The Examiner*, 21 August 1814. Quoted in Jonathan Bate, ‘Wordsworth, Ruskin, and the Moral of Landscape’, *Literature and Belief* 10 (1990) 1–23 (p. 1).

seems to have shaped present-day perception of *The Excursion*. Many readers today seem to share Jeffrey's belief that the poem 'will never do', giving it a secondary status in the Wordsworthian canon. Matthew Arnold is also very likely to have contributed to the indifference with which the poem has been met until very recently: '*The Excursion* and *The Prelude*', he wrote in 1879, 'are by no means [Wordsworth's] best work'.<sup>16</sup> While *The Prelude* seems to have proven Arnold wrong, *The Excursion* remains almost entirely neglected by Wordsworthian scholars, except for the heavy attention many of them give to Margaret's story in Book I.

In a discussion of *The Excursion* in light of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, Jonathan Bate raises the question: 'who now reads *The Excursion*?' adding in the first note to his article, 'I make no apology for including substantial quotations from *The Excursion* [...] since [this work is] now all too little known'.<sup>17</sup> The last few years, however, could be said to have witnessed a slow revival of interest in *The Excursion*, which was especially pioneered by substantial scholarly works such as Kenneth R. Johnston's *Wordsworth and The Recluse*, Sally Bushell's *Re- Reading The Excursion*, and the publication of the Cornell edition of the poem in 2007. In most studies of it, both old and new, *The Excursion*'s 'ethical content' remains a central topic of discussion.<sup>18</sup> Critics have concentrated on Wordsworth's philosophy embedded in the poem, which, by 1814, has matured and found its medium of expression through the combination of dialogue, description, and storytelling. The essence of this philosophy is to be found in the poem's argument which, according to Charles Lamb, revolves around how 'to abate the pride of the calculating *understanding*, and to reinstate the *imagination* and the *affections* in those seats from which modern philosophy has

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Bate, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

labored but too successfully to expel them'.<sup>19</sup> My discussion of *The Excursion* in this chapter originates in Wordsworth's philosophy so neatly summed up by Lamb, but I steer away from systematically discussing this philosophy, offering instead a reading of the manner in which Wordsworth's examination of some of the most important social issues of his day employs the concepts of nature and place.

Nature plays an important role in *The Excursion*, which is also a poem about particular places, for it is especially through the Solitary's and the Pastor's valleys that Wordsworth seeks to illustrate some of his views about society, modernity, and the impact of industrialization. A question which the current chapter seeks to address is whether or not nature within a certain locale is seen as a force working through a community rather than working mainly through the individual in order to heal the ills of a society suffering from the consequences of socio-economic transformation at a time of great change.

This chapter also offers a reading of the social aspects of Wordsworth's 'Michael: A Pastoral Poem', focusing especially on the methods through which nature and a specific locality are used to illustrate, through the plight of the shepherd Michael, larger issues affecting society as a whole. Michael's small household was deeply rooted in nature and its northern setting, and enjoyed a contented, peaceful and traditional way of life which was swept away by the changes taking place around it, forces beyond the family's control that took away all they had, including the son, leaving only a tree and a half-finished sheepfold to testify to their sad destiny.

The chapter first examines the Solitary's life as representative of modern man, and the valley he inhabits as a spot of nature, then moves on to compare the place with Grasmere Vale. A discussion of the Wanderer and his natural education follows,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

offering a glimpse of a healthier way of life inspired by nature. A reading of the two revelations described in *The Excursion* comes next, demonstrating how the progression between those revelations is central to the solution Wordsworth envisioned for the problems of modern man. The last section in this chapter investigates Wordsworth's treatment of the theme of the Industrial Revolution and the effects of modernization in *The Excursion* and 'Michael'.

### **The Tenant of the Solitude: the Solitary as Anti-Social Model**

The Solitary could be seen as representative of modern man, someone who suffers from alienation and apathy, who has lost faith in the good inherent in human nature, who has no certain direction or aim in life, and who has been deracinated, thus figuratively becoming someone with no past or future. The Solitary stands for an entire generation 'of despondent idealists' whom Coleridge describes as 'those who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an epicurean selfishness'.<sup>20</sup> A character like this is prone to depression, cynicism, and emotional instability. Wordsworth deems this type of person ill – indeed he refers to the Solitary as 'sick' more often than not, and believes that his condition needs to be addressed. Curing the Solitary's despondency is a task which the poet and the Wanderer take on through a series of debates they engage in with the Solitary and stories they tell him.

When the Poet-narrator expresses his wish to the Wanderer that they attend a festival held in the mountains, his old friend declines, telling him that he will find 'good recompense [...], for this day's toil/From sight of One who lives secluded there' (II, 165-66). The life of this isolated 'One' is deemed by the Wanderer to be food for

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<sup>20</sup> Johnston, pp. 265–266.

thought for the Poet's curious mind, something he was not to find in the distraction of a festival's illusory acts. We find out later that the person referred to by the Wanderer is the Solitary, a despondent misanthropist who lives in an almost entirely secluded valley among the mountains. The Wanderer knew a lot about the Solitary and his life which he relates to the Poet.

After the two men meet the Solitary, they ask him to describe what had happened to the poor late Pensioner who shares the same cottage with him. His response begins with a telling generalization,

Outcast and cut off

As we seem here, and must have seemed to you  
When ye looked down upon us from the crag,  
Islanders of a stormy Mountain sea,  
We are not so;—perpetually we touch  
Upon the vulgar ordinance of the world.

(II, 758–763)

The metaphor of the Solitary's valley as an island amid the 'mountain sea,' floating with no links to the mainland to stabilize it is significant: it reflects the nature of the inhabitants of that island – alienated, not grounded in the world, and lacking any roots. This valley provides a valuable insight into the character of the Solitary. It is through the description Wordsworth provides of this place that we discern his disapproval of its tenant's choice of life, one which others 'look down' on as the Solitary himself recognises.

The place the Solitary has chosen as his retreat is located on the western side of the vale of Langdale. The 'circular recess' where his cottage stands is called Blea-

Tarn.<sup>21</sup> When the Wanderer and the Poet approach the place, the first thing they encounter is death: as they stand at the top of a hill overlooking the valley, they hear a ‘solemn sound,’ which is ‘mournful, deep, and slow’ (II, 394–395). This was a ‘funeral dirge’ which the Wanderer takes to have been performed for the Solitary. When he is proven wrong, and the Solitary appears at the entrance to a hiding place near his cottage, he does not notice his visitors as he is talking to a crying child. He was trying to ‘soothe [the] Child, who walked beside him, weeping/As if disconsolate’ (II, 533–534). The child knew the deceased, and was mourning his death. When the Wanderer comments on the funeral, saying that death is a blessing when there is such love in the hearts of the people nearest and dearest to the deceased, the Solitary disagrees, allowing his listeners to learn about his more cynical view of people. He says that there is not such love or loyalty left in people – the late Pensioner will be buried ‘without such pomp of grief’ as the Wanderer described, and ‘this simple Child will mourn him one short hour,/And I shall miss him: scanty tribute!’ (II, 624–629). The people of this valley embodied the selfishness and lack of compassion prevalent in modern society, albeit on a smaller scale. The Solitary wishes that his visitors had come a few days earlier so they could see ‘what stuff the Dwellers in a solitude,/That seems by Nature hollowed out to be/The seat and bosom of pure innocence/Are made of’ (II, 649–652). We later learn that what happened to the Pensioner was indeed inhumane.

The Solitary’s valley was rough and unfriendly, and Wordsworth employs negative terms in describing it, as is apparent in the Poet’s account of the path he and the Wanderer took to get there,

We clomb without a track to guide our steps;

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<sup>21</sup> *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), p. 199.

And, on the summit, reached a heathy plain,  
 With a tumultuous waste of huge hill tops  
 Before us; savage region! And I walked  
 In weariness.

(II, 343–347)

The place was barren and wild, full of rocks which ‘encompassed’ it, ‘a treeless nook,’ where even animals do not find comfort: ‘small birds find in spring no thicket [...] / To shroud them,’ and ‘from the neighbouring Vales / The Cuckoo straggling up to the hill tops / Shouteth faint tidings of some gladder place’ (II, 354–368). Although Wordsworth admits that the place is quiet, he points out that its utter seclusion and urn-like shape make it feel like a prison with only one entrance, a ‘small opening, where a heath-clad ridge / Supplied a boundary less abrupt and close’ than the rocks surrounding it (II, 355–356). The Solitary himself refers to this place as a prison. When his guests, having had a meal and heard the story of the rescue and death of the Pensioner, leave the despondent man’s house, he says, ‘ye have left my Cell,—but see / How Nature hems you in with friendly arms! / And by her help ye are my Prisoners still’ (III.13–15). Although the Solitary, like nature, means this in a friendly way, one cannot help being reminded that the Valley, despite some positive qualities, is in some ways a prison, and the word ‘Cell’ can refer to either a hermit’s cell, or a prisoner’s cell. The more negative reading is perhaps encouraged by Wordsworth’s own unfavourable description of the valley.

The Wanderer next suggests that they take a path which leads uphill, towards the source of a stream. As they climb, they find themselves ‘shut out from prospect of the open Vale’ (III, 39), eventually reaching a ‘hidden nook’ located ‘Upon a semicirque of turf-clad ground,’ near some large and remarkable stones (III, 51–52). The Wanderer greets this place: ‘behold a Cabinet for Sages built, / Which Kings might



envy!' (III, 76-77). It was in this setting that the Solitary gives his account of his despair: 'sleep/Doth, in my estimate of good, appear/A better state than waking; death than sleep' (III, 283-85). He recognizes that his interest in 'the destiny of human kind' is 'As an intellectual game pursued/With curious subtilty, thereby to cheat/Irksome sensations' (III, 291-93). At first the listeners are content with their situation, and when the Solitary suggests that he has said enough and they might move from the nook, they find themselves 'loth to forsake the spot' (III, 336). This place seems to have been perfect for reflection upon the self and life in general because of its isolated location. When the Solitary's language becomes more bitter, however, the listeners' view changes:

Desirous to divert,  
Or stem, the current of the Speaker's thoughts,  
We signified a wish to leave that Place  
Of stillness and close privacy, which seemed  
A nook for self-examination framed,  
Or, for confession, in the sinner's need,  
Hidden from all Men's view.

(III, 476-482)

The Solitary this time refuses to leave, but finds a nearby 'slope/Of mossy turf' on which they could sit as he embarks on the history of his adult life and the tragedies and adventures it had contained.

Before the Wanderer and the Poet had met the Solitary in person, and before he had told them about his life, the Wanderer tells the poet about the man's life, explaining the origins of his despair. The Solitary is, as the Wanderer puts it, a 'lonesome and lost' man (II, 167). He came from a 'stock of lowly parentage/Among the wilds of Scotland' where he was 'well-tended' and 'sheltered' by his parents, and

where he grew to be a pious and innocent young man (II, 172–177). Having excelled in study, he was chosen to become a minister, and was later appointed ‘Chaplain to a Military Troop/Cheered by the Highland bagpipe’ (II, 186–187). In the course of his wanderings with the troop he met a ‘blooming Lady—a conspicuous flower,/Admired for beauty, for her sweetness praised’ (II, 198–199). The two fell in love and later got married. This promising start to the man’s life did not last long: the couple lived happily for a while and was blessed with two children. However ‘in the short course of one undreaded year/Death blasted all. It suddenly o’erthrew/Two lovely children [...]/The Mother followed’ (II, 210–213). This blow devastated the Solitary, and he consequently ‘prayed/For his dismissal; day and night’ until utter despair fell upon him, ‘An uncomplaining apathy displaced/This anguish; and, indifferent to delight,/To aim and purpose, he consumed his days’ (II, 214–220). Depressed and completely disoriented, the Solitary spent his days without a clearly defined goal until a life–defining purpose presented itself in the form of the French Revolution. When news about the events in France reached Britain, the lonely man ‘broke from his contracted bounds, [and] repaired/To the great City’ where he ‘from the Pulpit zealously maintained/The cause of Christ and civil liberty,/As one; and moving to one glorious end’ (II, 230–237). Easy it might have been to decide to defend and adopt the cause of liberty; to escape being influenced by its decline, however, was not that easy. When the Revolution started to get more and more violent, the Solitary ‘took a mortal taint’ (II, 260). He not only resented the causes of the decline of revolutionary ideals, but also everything he had associated with the Revolution in his mind, such as religion. As a result he felt ‘an infidel contempt of holy writ/[Steal] by degrees upon his mind’ (II, 264–265). He ‘broke faith with them whom he had laid/In earth’s dark chambers, with a Christian’s hope’ and continued to live as a preacher, ‘double–

faced;/[In] vilest hypocrisy' (II, 262–267). The Solitary later renounced his position and began to suffer 'moods/Of pain' and despair when 'humbled liberty grew weak' (II, 293, 290). With 'The glory of the times fading away–/The splendour, which had given a festal air/To self–importance,' the man lost all faith he had in human nature, especially when he saw how men 'Too weak even for his envy or his hate,' flourishing 'Before his sight in power or fame' (II, 308–318). He became 'consumed,/And vexed, and chafed, by levity and scorn,/And fruitless indignation,' and, after some wandering, 'he fixed his home,/[...] Among these rugged hills' (II, 312–314, 321–326).

This tragic tale was not merely brought on the Solitary by fate. He contributed to his downfall by having a weak personality and no purpose in life. Purposelessness is a trait shared by a lot of modern people, but the Solitary had an equally dangerous attribute – he was both proud while also being insecure. He mainly relied on outer guidance and motivation to define himself, and his self–worth was largely determined by people he was linked with or by things he did. Moreover, nothing interested him long enough, and he had no real dedication to anything. This resulted in disaster, for when the things he loved and was attached to lost their novelty or disappeared from his life, the Solitary became completely aimless and no longer knew who he was. In the wake of the Revolution he detested the whole world and lost faith in other people, which resulted in him deciding 'that he will live and die/Forgotten,–at a safe distance from "a world/Not moving to his mind"' (II, 330–332). The first ever job the Solitary took up, the military chaplaincy, was not chosen because he truly liked and believed in this mission, but for 'lack of better hopes' and out of curiosity (II, 182–186). Being naturally prone to pride, the young man became 'an intellectual ruler in the haunts/Of social vanity' within the troop (II, 191–192). He 'walked the world,/Gay, and

affecting graceful gaiety; lax, buoyant—less a pastor with his flock/Than a soldier among soldiers' (II, 192–195). This lack of purpose is also apparent in what he did after marriage: the Solitary's wife was 'most rich in gifts of mind,/Nor sparingly endowed with worldly wealth' (II, 202–203). This fortune enabled the Solitary to relinquish his office and go to live with her. When the wife and children died, the Solitary's life lost all meaning and direction because it was only they who gave it meaning. With no job or family to dedicate his life to, the Solitary asked for death as it was too painful for him to face his emptiness every day for the rest of his life. Unable to attain death, the Solitary became 'indifferent' to everything— 'delight,/[...] aim and purpose' (II, 219–220). While this dejection is understandable in the aftermath of such a disaster, the Solitary's reaction to the death of his loved ones further confirms the fact that he had very little inner strength to sustain him when outer support had failed him. His self is so defined by others and by circumstances that, once they change or disappear, his self does too. When his life gained a new meaning deriving from the cause of liberty and equality, he dedicated his whole life to this new aim. However, here too something was missing, and the role he decided to play in the political and social arenas -- a preacher advocating the Christian principles of love, fraternity and liberty which the revolution also put forth -- was not something he took on out of love and sincere devotion, but out of self-gratification: 'a happy service,' the Solitary's new job was, 'for he was sincere/As vanity and fondness for applause/And new and shapeless wishes, would allow' (II, 239–241). Having thus followed vanity and self-fulfillment as his guides on an uncertain path of purposelessness, the Solitary was necessarily heading for disaster: when this belief too fell apart, so did his Christian faith. The Solitary's faith was too weak to withstand a trial which even 'the strongest did not easily escape' (II, 259). In the ensuing misery

experienced, the Solitary struggled more than others because he was weaker and had no moral stamina to see him through or give him ‘encouragement’ and ‘hope,’

For moral dignity, and strength of mind,  
Were wanting; and simplicity of life;  
And reverence for himself; and, last and best,  
Confiding thoughts, through love and fear of Him  
Before whose sight the troubles of this world  
Are vain, as billows in a tossing sea

(II, 302–307)

This human frailty saw the Solitary use religion as a vehicle for personal gain. He used Christianity to gain popularity within the troop, and later pushed his own agenda at the time of the Revolution, using his religious knowledge. Even after doubts filled his mind about his faith when the revolutionary cause began to lose momentum, the Solitary kept his skepticism a secret and did not quit his religious duties. He used his post to ‘wheedle simple souls’ with his ‘smooth words’ in an act Wordsworth describes as one of ‘vilest hypocrisy’, of the ‘the laughing, gay’ type, ‘not leagued with fear, but pride’ (II, 267–268).

Despite the fact that the Solitary is mainly depicted in a negative light, Wordsworth also delves into the other side of his personality. Although the Solitary is a cynic who believes in nothing and is indifferent to others as well as life in general, he enjoys the company of children. The hideout which the Wanderer and the Poet come across by chance and which proves to be the Solitary’s retreat is ‘plainly wrought by children’s hands!/Whose skill had thronged the floor with a proud show/Of baby-houses’ (II, 446–448). When consoling the bereaved child, the old man tries not to hurt or corrupt him with his own sacrilegious ideas. Instead, he tells him in a soothing, factual tone ‘they to the grave/Are bearing [the Pensioner]’, adding

reassuringly, ‘but he will feel no pain;/His body is at rest, his soul in heaven’ (534–537). Curiously, then, although the Solitary did not have many friends and his contact with the people in the valley was scanty, he cared for children. He also has a special type of bond with nature resulting from the seclusion which characterizes his valley. For example, he only uses the word companion to describe the two mountain peaks which overlook his valley (II, 723). He understands their language and heeds their warnings when there is an approaching storm or flood (II, 721-735). This valley has a strong spiritual feel to it, and the Solitary seems to tap into it: he enjoys the ‘wild concert’ the hills take part in, and the ‘song/Of stream and headlong flood that seldom fails’ (727–732). The centre of such a scene of ‘harmony’ is the two peaks which possessed a ‘power to yield/Music of finer note’. When everything else is silent,

The clouds,  
 The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,  
 Motions of moonlight, all come thither–touch,  
 And have an answer–thither come, and shape  
 A language not unwelcome to sick hearts  
 And idle spirits:–there the sun himself,  
 At the calm close of summer’s longest day,  
 Rests his substantial orb;–between those heights  
 And on the top of either pinnacle,  
 More keenly than elsewhere in night’s blue vault,  
 Sparkle the stars, as of their station proud.  
 Thoughts are not busier in the mind of man  
 Than the mute agents stirring there:–alone  
 Here do I sit and watch.

(II, 735–752)

This very Wordsworthian description of a natural symphony playing to the Solitary's ears shows that all souls are open to the influence of nature and ready to commune with her, even the most afflicted among them. The Solitary instinctively understood the fact that nature is alive and has thinking 'agents', and that she provides answers for those willing to attune their faculties and souls to her language.

The good side to the Solitary is further revealed in the story he tells of the old Pensioner. In describing the way their landlady treated the old man, the Solitary speaks disapprovingly, and relates how he reproved her when she told him she had sent the Pensioner to collect wood under a raging storm. 'Inhuman!' he exclaimed angrily in response, 'was an old Man's life/Not worth the trouble of a thought?' (II, 817–818). He went out with the woman's husband to look for the old man when he fails to show up with sunset. They searched for him under worsening weather conditions, and when they failed to find him on the first day, the Solitary tells the Wanderer and the poet, 'I, who weep little, did, I will confess,/The moment I was seated here alone,/Honour my little cell with some few tears' (II, 827–829). When coming back from the rescue operation the following day, the Solitary saw an outstanding vision which nature chose him out of all the men present at that moment to witness.

The Solitary, then, represents Wordsworth's portrayal of modern man. He is a victim of his circumstances and personality flaws. His belief in the goodness inherent in humanity has given way to utter disbelief and cold indifference, but this does not mean that he did not have a heart underneath the hardened surface. He is modern man in his loneliness and preference for isolation, in his cold nature and lack of direction or purpose in life, and in his cynicism and cruelty. He detests the rest of humanity for he has seen the most horrible side of it, but deep down he preserves his own humanity

and keeps it hidden for he believes the world is not worth it, revealing his good nature only in front of children and at moments of high emotional turbulence.

### **The Vale of Grasmere: Healthy Abiding Place**

Wordsworth proposes Grasmere as an alternative community which may carry the solution to the problems of people such as the Solitary. This employment of Grasmere probably draws on personal experience: Wordsworth's tragic losses of his mother, father, and a family home where he and his siblings could live together created in him a deep longing for a place where he could rebuild his childhood bliss. Gill remarks that 'the existence of [a] community of loved and loving people [...] was of fundamental importance to Wordsworth. He loved with tenacity, as if to ground himself in the being of others'. It was in Grasmere that the poet believed he found 'fortitude, constancy, and love', qualities he believed essential for a balanced and happy life.<sup>22</sup> It is here that Wordsworth's own despondency was healed, and in *The Excursion* he was trying to spread the word so that others too could follow the same healing process. Having debated at length the Solitary's views on the meaning of human life and its destiny, the Wanderer suggests another technique in an attempt to pull the Solitary out of his apathy: he invites him to go to Grasmere. An idyllic small nook in the heart of outstanding natural scenery, Grasmere is by no means utopian. Its inhabitants share the common lot of misery and hardship humanity is destined to carry on its shoulders, as some of the Pastor's stories demonstrate. This little village, nonetheless, has a very important, and perhaps unique, feature: it has a strong sense of community, piety and love, and one's life in it is enriched by the virtue and simple

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<sup>22</sup> Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, pp. 182, 203.



heartedness shared by everyone. Wordsworth's view of the village is mirrored in his portrayal of the Grasmere valley and the stories told about its inhabitants.

The Wanderer, the Poet and the Solitary, having left the latter's vale, head toward Grasmere. The geography of the path they take does not quite match the narrative of the poem. In reality, the path south from Blea Tarn leads to Little Langdale, but the description of the church provided in the poem is in many ways based on Grasmere Church and the 'chrystal Mere' (V.81) on Grasmere Lake. Wordsworth is apparently blending different memories in this description, as he explained to Isabella Fenwick:

After we quit [the Solitary's] cottage, passing over a low ridge, we descend into another Vale that of Little Langdale towards the head of which stands embowered or partly shaded by Yews & other Trees something between a Cottage & a Mansion or Gentleman's house such as they once were in this country. This I convert into the Parsonage, & at the same time & as by the waving of a magic wand, I turn the comparatively confined Vale of Langdale, its Tarn, & the rude Chapel which once adorned the Valley, into the stately & comparatively spacious Vale of Grasmere & its ancient Parish Church.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear that although both valleys draw on specific geographical places in the Lake District, which renders them appropriate for the purposes of this thesis, their descriptions are works of fiction.

The road the three characters took down from the Solitary's valley to Grasmere 'descended rapidly/To the green meadows of another Vale' (V, 63-64). This valley is very different from the Solitary's: it is a 'cheerful quiet scene' with 'fair dwellings, single or in social knots' and other signs of habitation and prosperity (V, 89, 88). Dominating the small community is a church sitting on 'a rising ground,'

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<sup>23</sup> *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye. Appendix III, pp. 1214-24 (p. 1217).

with ‘tufted trees’ surrounding it (V, 79–80). This is different from the Solitary’s valley in which the small chapel is destroyed, ‘A heap of ruin, almost without walls/And wholly without roof’ (II, 838–839). Unlike the valley in Blea Tarn, too, there is a strong sense of rootedness in Grasmere which the Pastor and his church represent, a force of unity and stability which is the opposite of the restlessness marking the Solitary’s valley. Before the three men reach Grasmere valley, the Solitary hesitated, he ‘put forth his hand/In sign of farewell,’ but the Wanderer convinced him to remain with them (V, 65–67). This is probably because the Solitary felt that his isolated ways may be threatened by this new place, or that this new experience may bring back sad memories. Upon looking at the beautiful valley, the poet exclaims ‘as ‘mid some happy valley of the Alps /[...] A popular equality reigns here,’ which is something the Solitary was convinced never existed in this world (V. 91, 95). His valley is described as a ‘spot that seemed/Like the fixed centre of a troubled world’ (V, 15–16), whereas the valley of Grasmere is described in very different terms by him,

How gay the Habitations that adorn  
 This fertile Valley! Not a House but seems  
 To give assurance of content within;  
 Embosomed happiness, and placid love;  
 As if the sunshine of the day were met  
 With answering brightness in the hearts of all  
 Who walk this favoured ground.

(V, 407-413)

The Solitary immediately senses the contentment, love, and happiness in this valley and announces these feelings as the reasons for a simple but stable existence enjoyed

equally by everyone who lives there. When the Pastor joins the three men, the Solitary gets ready to leave again, something which the Poet senses,

I guess  
That He, who now upon the mossy wall  
Sate by my side, had vanished, if a wish  
Could have transferred him to his lonely House,  
Within the circuit of those guardian rocks.

(V, 442-446)

As before, either politeness, or an unacknowledged pleasure in the company, causes the Solitary to stay. After greetings, the Wanderer summarises the topics of debate for the Pastor, ‘is Man/A Child of hope? Do generations press/On generations, without progress made?’ (V, 460-462). To such questions the Pastor replies mildly, ‘angels may weigh and fathom [...] but, for ourselves/That speculative height we may not reach’ (V, 481, 483-4). The Wanderer, recognizing that their debates hitherto had not yielded any satisfactory outcome, asks the Pastor if he will tell them the stories of the people living in the surrounding houses, and particularly the lives of those buried in the churchyard. The poem thus turns from an abstract philosophical discussion to ‘the mine of real life’ (V, 631), and the methods intended to help the Solitary’s condition become more factual than theoretical.

Most of the stories the Pastor tells are about rural people of humble origins — very much like the Solitary himself — who are severely afflicted, but who believe that fortitude and faith would see them through hardship. They never lost hope or descended towards despair. Even the most miserable among them carry on: ‘they see their fate, they complain, they compromise, and they finally accept’, as Johnston puts

it.<sup>24</sup> Ellen, for instance, loses her baby, who dies without her being able to attend his funeral. She was poor and had to work for a family who did not allow her to see her newborn baby as often as required. She cries and grieves, but goes on with her life strengthened by her faith in God and her calm acceptance of her destiny. A different story with a similar effect is that of the family of six daughters who lose their mother but are able to pull themselves together through the pain of loss and grief, turning those feelings into positive, productive energy which made their household exemplary for its buzz of industry and abundance of love and domestic bliss. These stories show that the people afflicted have reconciled themselves with the fact that sadness is the common fate of humanity, and that they could either accept it and carry on with their lives, making a better future for themselves, or give in to fear and despair and consequently become doubly victimized. In short, these stories show how ‘suffering, imagination, and thought itself possess heroic possibilities’, highlighting ‘commonality, the one great society, and [...] unity in variety’.<sup>25</sup> The Vicar's stories have yet another message: they tell of the healing power of nature, particularly in a place as beautiful as the Lake District. This is partly what the story of the Northumbrian pastor is about. Having moved to the region after an eventful life, the man changes for the better, improves in body and soul, and ultimately regains his old good self, thus saving himself and his family and enjoying a blessed life with them (VII, 60–309). Willard Spiegelman contends that Wordsworth, through the presentation of ‘a score of characters, living and dead,’ asks us to ‘uncover the denominator uniting us, to prove his earlier and most important article of faith, not that love of nature leads to love of man but that “we have all of us one human

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<sup>24</sup> Johnston, p. 287.

<sup>25</sup> Willard Spiegelman, *Wordsworth's Heroes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 192–193.

heart”’.<sup>26</sup> Once more Wordsworth stresses the fact that the human condition is one and the same despite seeming differences. People share similar feelings and emotions; they experience grief and happiness in almost identical ways; to them love and fear also feel the same, which is unity beyond all unity.

Having stayed for a little while at the Pastor’s house, the three visitors go out with him and his family on the suggestion of his wife, who recommends that they take a boat to enjoy the beauty of the peaceful evening. The group walks in the valley, noticing even more differences between the place and the Solitary’s valley. The Pastor’s valley is not deep and urn-like, but wide with an extensive lake. It therefore does not suggest confinement but openness and freedom. It is more wooded and fertile, and besides its ‘Cultured slopes’ (505) reveals a variety of life: ‘A snow-white Ram’ (444), deer, fish, flowers. This is at odds with the lack of animal life in the Solitary’s valley noted above, and the fact that even passing birds find no sheltered corner there to protect them from the sun. Grasmere valley also contains an island on which the party stops to enjoy a picnic and listen to the Pastor’s daughter sing (534). When they leave the island the party sails across the lake to a place where ‘a projecting line of rock, that framed/A natural pier, invited us to land’ (568-69). They disembark there and the Pastor leads them up the hillside, from which they gain a magnificent view of the valley and its lake, at the far end of which Grasmere Church was seen ‘In majesty presiding o’er the Vale’ (576). It is here too that they see the sunset in its full glory and experience the revelation discussed later on. Wordsworth told Isabella Fenwick where this scene took place:

Upon the side of Loughrigg-fell at the foot of the Lake & looking down upon it  
& the whole Vale & its encompassing mountains, the Pastor is supposed by me  
to stand, when at Sunset he addresses his companions in words which I hope

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<sup>26</sup> Willard Spiegelman, p. 192.

my readers will remember.<sup>27</sup>

There are signs of improvement in the Solitary's despondency toward the end of the poem, but everyone knows how difficult and long a process it is to reverse a situation like his. The man who was always reluctant to stay with the group and who has tried to go back to his valley several times throughout the journey now promises to come back and meet with them again. His old cheerfulness also seems to return at times, especially in the Pastor's house. This is no full recovery, though, and it has led some critics to claim that Wordsworth has failed in honouring the promise he makes to completely help the Solitary out. Johnston, for example, argues that '[Wordsworth] did not succeed because of the enormity of the project'.<sup>28</sup> Other critics, such as Sally Bushell, argue that what mattered to Wordsworth was the process through which the Solitary is directed towards the right path to full recovery rather than the fulfillment of the task itself.<sup>29</sup> While perhaps true for the poem in its published form, such views overlook the fact that *The Excursion* was not completed, and that Wordsworth envisaged the subsequent parts in which the process of recovery would be outlined, but could not actually compose them. His full plan for the Solitary's regaining of his old self is recorded by Isabella Fenwick,

It was my wish, & I might say intention, that we should resume our wanderings & pass the borders into [the Solitary's] native country where as I hoped he might witness in the Society of the Wanderer some religious ceremony—a sacrament say, in the open fields, or a preaching among the Mountains, which by recalling to his mind the days of his early Childhood, when he had been present on such occasions in company with his Parents & nearest Kindred, might have dissolv'd his heart into tenderness & so done more towards restoring the Christian Faith in which he had

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<sup>27</sup> *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye, Appendix III, p. 1217.

<sup>28</sup> Johnston, p. 264.

<sup>29</sup> Sally Bushell, *Re- Reading the Excursion* (Hampshire: Ashgate publishing limited, 2002).

been educated, & with that, contentedness & even cheerfulness of mind, than all that the Wanderer & Pastor by their several effusions & addresses had been able to effect—an issue like this was in my intentions—But alas!<sup>30</sup>

Wordsworth, then, believed that the Solitary's despondency would have been corrected much more effectively through memory – especially childhood recollections – than the reasoning and storytelling employed by the Wanderer and the Pastor. Just like the spots of time, strength here too comes from childhood memories which also have a restorative power over the human mind and soul. Childhood experience, especially when accompanied by the right choice of path later on in life, is important. This idea is represented most clearly in the character of the Wanderer, who is used by Wordsworth as an example of a healthy and balanced person to whom the Solitary could be compared, as the following section sets out to explicate.

The present Chapter may, however, be linked with Chapter 3, on *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Both *The Lay* and *The Excursion* have several narrative strands and two important figures, the Minstrel and the Solitary. Both these men are alone, having suffered the death of their children. The Minstrel is old and poor. The Solitary is better provided for, but mentally less able to cope with what he has lost. Historical changes have undermined their contribution to society. In the Minstrel's case 'the bigots of the iron time'<sup>31</sup> / Had called his harmless art a crime' leading to the prohibition of the wandering singer and tale-teller. In the Solitary's case it is the damage to the ideals of the French Revolution by 'A proud and most presumptuous confidence' (II, 250) which had caused him to lose his faith and renounce his post as a clergyman. The narrative in both poems is set against changes in society. *The Lay* describes Border warfare in detail, but ends with the Borderers renouncing fighting.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Fenwick Notes*, pp. 215–216.

<sup>31</sup> Puritans of the seventeenth century (*Introduction*, lines 21–22).

*The Excursion* creates beautiful pictures of the Lake District; but in the conversation between the Wanderer and the Solitary in Book VIII we hear of the changes in society brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the consequent suffering of both nature and man. Scott writes of wrongs in the past, suggesting that they can be cured; Wordsworth writes of wrongs in his own day -- those of industrialisation and capitalism -- telling us of those who, like Michael, suffered with no hope of a cure.

### **The Natural Education of the Wanderer**

Wordsworth famously declares to Isabella Fenwick,

had I been born in a class which would have deprived me of what is called a liberal education, it is not unlikely that being strong in body, I should have taken to a way of life such as that in which my Pedlar passed the greater part of his days. At all events I am here called upon freely to acknowledge that the character I have represented in his person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances.<sup>32</sup>

The Wanderer is a free spirit and a true chosen son of nature, just like his creator.

Wordsworth presents him in *The Excursion* as having had a similar natural education to the one he himself had when he was young. The poem paints the Wanderer's character as someone who is wise and rational yet with strong imaginative powers. He counteracts the Solitary's despondency and engages with him in long debates over significant issues, proving to be a force of reason and hope against the Solitary's more cynical and pessimistic views. In fact, it could even be argued that the Wanderer represents nature: a wise and benign force of harmony and unity, whereas the Solitary represents the mind: abstract and always thinking of itself as separate from others.

The Solitary wants to spend his entire life alone in purposelessness among his

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<sup>32</sup> *The Fenwick Notes*, p. 195.



unfinished science projects and scattered books, whereas the Wanderer realizes that the secret to happiness is in harmony with others and nature, and therefore tries to restore harmony in the Solitary's life. I propose to look at the character of the Wanderer as part of Wordsworth's response to the modern condition in general, and the Solitary's despair in particular. This section attempts to briefly examine the ways in which the representation of the Wanderer allows him to assume such a role.

One of the points Wordsworth makes in *The Excursion* is that one's fate is somewhat determined by one's choices. This idea is echoed in the origins of the characters of the Wanderer and the Solitary. A poem with a predominantly Lake District setting, *The Excursion* curiously discusses, amongst others, two main characters who started out in life in the Highlands of Scotland. The Wanderer had been born 'among the hills of Athol', in Perthshire (I, 112), and the Solitary 'among the wilds of Scotland' (II, 173). A possible reason for this choice is that, although both characters came from humble homes, Wordsworth wanted them to be educated and literate – which, as *The Excursion* indicates, was not usually the case for the poor in England. The Scottish post-Reformation church had a reputation for austerity, and for putting its emphasis on the Bible, as a consequence of which village schools to teach even the poor to read were commoner in Scotland than England.<sup>33</sup> The Wanderer had a similar background to the Solitary; despite this, he took a very different route in life, and ended up in a very different position: content, strong in body and mind, optimistic, and boasting ties with many people in the communities he visits to offer his merchandise. The Wanderer's simple life reflects his personality: he is not a vain greedy person who cares about appearances and uses people or situations

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<sup>33</sup> Wordsworth would have been aware of the popular view of Scottish education through the case of the poet Robert Burns (1759-96), who was well educated for the son of a poor tenant farmer. *The Works of Robert Burns: with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism on his Writings. To which are prefixed, some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry*, ed. James Currie, 4 vols (London, 1800), Vol. I, 'Prefatory Remarks'.

to his own advantage. In fact, the Wanderer does not have a stable home, and his only wealth is perhaps a few humble belongings packed in a little bag he carries around with him wherever he goes. This allows for non-attachment to any place, people, or status symbols, which leads to the self being given up to God completely. This is perhaps why nature chose him to be one of her own privileged students. As a boy the Wanderer would be sent out in the summer to the high ground to tend herds, and there he would watch dawn,

He beheld the sun  
 Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked—  
 Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth  
 And ocean's liquid mass, beneath him lay  
 In gladness and deep joy.  
 [...]
   
 In such access of mind, in such high hour  
 Of visitation from the living God,  
 Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired,  
 No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request,  
 Rapt into still communion that transcends  
 The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,  
 His mind was a thanksgiving to the power  
 That made him; it was blessedness and love!

(I. 220-24, 232-39)

The deep state of communion which The Wanderer experiences here demonstrates the strength of his imagination through which he was able to connect with 'the living God'. Once this happens all thought is suspended as the mind no longer perceives the duality it usually experiences the world through: it does not think as it has become the thought, and it does not offer any prayers or praise to God as a token of gratitude for it

has itself become the act of prayer – language and rituals having consequently become redundant.

His family being poor, the Wanderer had to work as a shepherd at an early age to support himself. He went to school in the winter, and on his way back home in the evening he sometimes witnessed ‘the hills,/Grow larger in the darkness’ (I, 143–144). As he walked back alone from school, he ‘beheld the stars come out above his head,/[...] With no one near/To whom he might confess the things he saw’ (I, 145–147). Such visionary moments in which the mind perceives things as they really are, not as they appear to be are similar to Wordsworth’s accounts in *The Prelude* of his own visionary experiences. This strong affinity between the Wanderer and nature had a decisive role in shaping his personality. He comes from a religious family, the poem tells us, but his learnt Christian belief was of a different, less intense type of faith than that he experienced in nature. His natural religion was something he lived and experienced for himself on a daily basis, ‘early had he learned/To reverence the volume that displays/The mystery [...] /But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith’ (I, 244–247). This faith was stronger than theoretically acquired religion as experience and feeling are stronger than thought.<sup>34</sup> He realized that in nature ‘littleness was not; the least of things/Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped/Her prospects, nor did he believe,—he *saw*’ (I, 251–253). Nature taught him through direct experience ‘immortality, revolving life,/And greatness still revolving; infinite’ (I, 249–250). As a result of that, it was no wonder that ‘his being [...] became/Sublime and comprehensive! Low desires,/Low thoughts had there no place; yet was his heart/Lowly; for he was meek in gratitude’ (I, 254–257). Being grateful enhances one’s religious experience as it opens up channels between the self and the divine.

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<sup>34</sup> See note to page 84.

Thus did nature prepare the Wanderer to become a wise person free from strong base desires for he has given up himself to the greater forces in life, and had no false hopes and ambitions such as those the Solitary entertained. The Wanderer's choice of life was very different from his friend: he lived humbly and served others in a job which benefited all parties concerned. He was well-grounded in life, and had a strong community sense despite the fact that he had no fixed abode. The Wanderer is, in Bate's words, 'unalienated,' and he 'offers a path back to nature' just 'like Schiller's "naïve" poet'. In an explanation of what he means by 'naïve,' Bate continues, "naïve" can be a positive term, as it is for Schiller and as it is in the Wordsworthian figure of the child with its unmediated relationship to nature'.<sup>35</sup> The Wanderer, then, has direct access to nature, as already established, and is one who is in the world but not of it. This allows him to see things objectively and to become a force of harmony and love wherever he went: he was respected and welcomed lovingly everywhere, and he resolved people's conflicts and brought peace into their lives (II, 61–83). He even acknowledged the 'rights' of all living beings and 'felt for all' God's creatures: 'Birds and beasts,' 'the mute fish that glances in the stream,' 'the harmless reptile coiling in the sun,' and 'the gorgeous insect hovering in the air' (II, 44–50).

The Wanderer, then, is portrayed as a force of love, harmony, and unity, living in oneness with his surroundings and with all creation. He is *The Excursion's* response to the despair and apathy shown by people such as the Solitary who have fallen victims to the modern era. Like Wordsworth himself, the Wanderer achieved oneness through the influence of nature, who has operated in his life as a guide, leading him through individual experience to see the unity that pervades all creation. He is a solitary figure who is not part of any community, yet he does not live in

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<sup>35</sup> Bate, p. 4.

seclusion, nor does he hate humanity like the Solitary. This love he feels for others is derived from his affinity and communion with nature, which have allowed him to have an unshakable faith based in experience rather than theory. The Solitary's religious faith was more theoretical, deriving its validity from the mind rather than the heart, which resulted in its inability to stand the test of a groundbreaking event such as the French Revolution.

### **Natural Visions: The Two Great Revelations in *The Excursion***

Two revelations take place in *The Excursion*, both of which are set in nature. The first is experienced by the Solitary after the old Pensioner has been found sleeping in a ruined chapel in the mountains. Though one of several members of the group of rescuers who found the old man, the Solitary was the only one to see the vision. The second revelation is experienced by a group consisting of the Pastor and his family, the Wanderer, the Poet, and the Solitary. It was experienced in Grasmere by everyone in the group.

The Solitary's vision is expressed through Christian symbolism, which is especially curious given the man's lack of faith in God and the afterlife. Having just rescued the old Pensioner, the rescuers head back home when, the Solitary reminisces,

A step,  
A single step, that freed me from the skirts  
Of the blind vapour, opened to my view  
Glory beyond all glory ever seen  
By waking sense or by the dreaming soul!  
[...]  
The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,  
Was of a mighty City—boldly say

A wilderness of building, sinking far  
 And self-withdrawn into a boundless depth,  
 Far sinking into splendor—without end!  
 Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,  
 With alabaster domes, and silver spires,  
 And blazing terrace upon terrace, high  
 Uplifted; here, serene pavilions bright,  
 In avenues disposed; there, towers begirt  
 With battlements that on their restless fronts  
 Bore stars--illumination of all gems!

(II, 859–880)

On the face of it, this very unusual ‘mighty city’ was, the Solitary points out, no more than an optical illusion created by ‘earthly nature [...] upon the dark materials of the storm/Now pacified’ (II, 881–883). What the Solitary knew all too well, however, was that this was no trick of the eye, and that there was a deeper meaning to this vision: ‘twas visible—/I saw not, but I felt that it was there/That which I *saw* was the revealed abode/Of Spirits in beatitude’ (II, 906–909). His inner eye was at work now, and he could see things which lay beyond the reach of normal eyesight. What was ‘revealed’ to him was very unusual: he saw a glimpse of the afterlife which he did not believe in. It is worth noting that some parallels could be drawn between the Solitary’s vision and Wordsworth’s revelation on Mount Snowdon discussed in Chapter II. On the summit of Mount Snowdon, Wordsworth saw vapours transform the whole landscape into a grand vision of undefined shapes of far away hills and sea waters. Vapour blurred the boundaries between what the eye is accustomed to see as distinct in form and well defined, and what is not. This allows the poet to look beyond appearances and gain insight into the eternal Soul residing in every form of life. The

vapours engulfing the hill where the Pensioner was found served a similar purpose for the Solitary: it made things look different, and, aided by the effect of the heavy rain which had just subsided, it created the illusion of a sparkly golden spectacle. This change in the way natural objects usually looked revealed to the inner eye of the old man a scene he would never have witnessed in normal circumstances. The Solitary was the one person out of the group of rescuers who saw the vision. This is typically Wordsworthian, and might be seen as drawing on personal experience. Wordsworth perhaps projected aspects of himself into his depiction of the Solitary, especially in terms of the trauma the two men suffered in the wake of the tragic events in France. It is therefore reasonable perhaps to suggest that Wordsworth might have become another Solitary figure -- a cynical misanthropist, had it not been for the benign influence of some loving people, combined with nature's restorative spiritual influence. The fact that the story of the Pensioner's death resembles Wordsworth's own father's tragic end further reinforces the suggestion that Wordsworth to some degree identified with the Solitary: both Wordsworth's father and the Pensioner lost their way amidst a storm, spent the night in the wild, and died soon after. The fact that nature chose to expose the Solitary to the beautiful vision he experienced coming back home after the Pensioner has been found may be a result of nature's plan to restore faith in the Solitary in a manner similar to the way Wordsworth's faith was restored after his own trauma. The revelation could be seen as the direct result of the new sense of unity emerging between the Solitary, who has just risked his life searching for the lost man, thus getting more in harmony with the 'sad music of humanity', and nature. It is indeed telling that the spot where the Pensioner had been found was an old chapel where he had been sleeping peacefully like a child in the rain, and that the revelation the Solitary experienced was Christian in nature. It was as

if nature had handed back the Pensioner to the group as a reborn person who had been baptized by the pure rain after having known religion through experience in nature. It seems that nature wanted the Solitary to experience this new type of faith, mediated by her, rather than the mind -- which had been the only source of belief for him before.

It is also through nature that the second vision portrayed in *The Excursion* is experienced: From a vantage point on Loughrigg Fell, and against the background of a magnificent sunset, the group of people led by the Pastor experience a vision. The whole of poem hitherto has been involved in philosophical and religious debate, predominantly about the meaning and destiny of human life. When the debaters are the Wanderer and the Solitary, these questions are addressed largely through reason and the agency of nature; when the Pastor joins them, he adds a more orthodox Christian dimension drawing on the Bible and the traditions of the Church, and less on personal responses to nature. All the speakers have a role for reason in considering human life, whether individual or social. In addition, they all have experience of transcendence in the presence of nature. Although the Pastor represents institutionalized religion, he does not experience the revelation in the church but out in the open. He subsequently utters a long and explicitly Christian prayer in the middle of natural surroundings, not back in his chapel.

While the group were walking, they noticed how the setting sun had

Attained his western bound; but rays of light—  
 Now suddenly diverging from the orb  
 Retired behind the mountain tops or veiled  
 By the dense air—shot upwards to the crown  
 Of the blue firmament—aloft, and wide:  
 And multitudes of little floating clouds,



Through their ethereal texture pierced—ere we,  
 Who saw, of change were conscious—had become  
 Vivid as fire; clouds separately poised,—  
 Innumerable multitude of Forms  
 Scattered through half the circle of the sky;  
 And giving back, and shedding each on each,  
 With prodigal communion, the bright hues  
 Which from the unapparent fount of glory  
 They had imbibed, and ceased not to receive.  
 That which the heavens displayed, the liquid deep  
 Repeated; but with unity sublime!

(IX, 590–608)

This beautiful image of the sun disappearing behind the mountains reveals a moment of natural communion at its most sublime: the sun shot his rays through the clouds, painting them orange, and they in turn deflected those rays on to other clouds, thus spreading the fire-like colour of the sun among the clouds in the sky. The lake also took part in this spectacle by reflecting it all on its still surface, thus becoming one with all the other elements reflected on its surface, a source of ‘unity’ in this majestic vision. This bond created between the different natural forms could be taken to extend to the people witnessing the revelation: by experiencing the revelation together a bond has been also created between the spectators, heightening their enjoyment and making it more whole and complete for it was ‘imperfect while unshared’, as I have already pointed out (IX, 584–587).<sup>36</sup> Having witnessed this natural symphony, the Pastor raises his hands to the sky and says a long prayer to God in an expression of his gratitude and strong belief:

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<sup>36</sup> Willard Spiegelman, p. 209.

Eternal Spirit! Universal God!  
 Power inaccessible to human thought  
 Save by degrees and steps which Thou hast deigned  
 To furnish; for this Image of Thyself,  
 To the infirmity of mortal sense  
 Vouchsafed;  
 [...]

Accept the thanks  
 Which we, thy humble Creatures, here convened,  
 Presume to offer.

(IX, 614–624)

The Pastor recognises the revelation as a reflection of God in nature, and his prayer brings together both forms of religion, for it is an overtly typical Christian address to the Almighty from His grateful faithful flock as well as an acknowledgment that what the group saw in nature through the sun, clouds, and water was an image of God made accessible to the human mind through the agency of natural forms. The prayer also admits that the power to perceive God and his presence is not in man's hands: it is a gift God Himself bestows on men by various 'degrees and steps' as He deems fit; this power, then, has little to do with rituals and designated prayer, and can be felt irrespective of time and place.

There is a movement in *The Excursion* from the personal to the collective, from the Solitary's lonely valley to Grasmere valley with its hundreds of inhabitants, from a revelation experienced by one person to a collective vision witnessed by a large company of people. This movement, which is best exemplified in the two natural revelations, could be Wordsworth's way of saying that a sense of community experienced in close proximity with nature is the main cure for the ills of modern

man. It is true that the poem presents solitude as important for an initial experience of nature as is the case with the Wanderer who, like Wordsworth himself, lived close to nature and experienced several revelations as a boy, and always when he was alone. This solitary oneness with nature, however, yielded itself to a more communal sense of unity with other people, manifesting itself in the Wanderer's constant movement from one town to another, bringing with him happiness and peace, and weaving an invisible link between people, uniting them all in love. The Solitary also experienced the power of natural revelation alone, but this was not enough on its own to cure his chronic despondency: his connection with nature had to fall into place within its larger collective framework as an experience shared with others and a oneness felt with them.

### **Nature and Industrialization**

Wordsworth's social message in *The Excursion* is partly centered on his view of the changes both society and nature are subjected to as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Acknowledging such a change as an inescapable force in human life, the Wanderer takes the lead in discussing the new developments occurring under a gradual but steady industrialization process. His discussion involves issues which were facing the nation as a whole, beginning with industrialization and extending to poverty and education. The wise man notes how 'the foot-path faintly marked, the horse-track wild,/And formidable length of plashy lane,/Have vanished, swallowed up by stately roads' (VIII, 107–111). This is a largely positive advancement, making travel cheaper and more accessible yet at the same time causing pollution. 'Meanwhile,' the Wanderer adds, 'at social Industry's command,/How quick, how fast an increase! From the germ/Of some poor Hamlet, rapidly produced/Here a huge

town,' which inevitably resulted in 'the face of earth' being 'hidden for leagues', and 'the smoke of unremitting fires/Hang[ing] permanent' in the sky (VIII, 118–127). The increase in shipping bringing goods from around the world into Britain is a positive sign, and it strengthens the country's ability to resist those who might invade it (VIII, 134–148). 'The darker side/Of this great change', however, is expressed by the Wanderer to be the 'outrage done to nature' (VIII, 152–155). Nature's course is being subverted as a result of change. One example of this is 'unnatural light,/Prepared for never–resting Labour's eyes' (VIII, 169–170). The people working night shifts include 'Men, Maidens, Youths,/Mother and little Children, Boys and Girls' (VIII, 182–183). The bodies of such workers will inevitably get weaker and more prone to disease. People are meant to benefit from the sun and natural light and to allow their bodies to rest at night. Furthermore, those workers do not have the opportunity to attend services held at night as was the custom in the old days – they now have to work at night, replacing their faith in God with a new god: money or 'gain', as the Wanderer reflects (VIII, 185–197). The adverse effects of industrialization have even extended to children, who were especially victimized by the cotton and wool industries. Children were enslaved and imprisoned by their bosses at mills: they are 'Slave[s] to whom release comes not,/And cannot come. 'The Boy,' the Wanderer points out, where'er he turns,/Is still a prisoner' (VIII, 303–305). The health of working children is destroyed as they are exposed to severe and unhealthy work conditions which make their 'lip pale,' their 'respiration quick and audible,' and prevent the 'gleam/From out those languid eyes' to shine (VIII, 313–317). Such a bleak prospect and unjust treatment of children force a long cry of pain and indignation out of the mouth of the otherwise calm and composed wise man,

Is that the countenance, and such the port,

Of no mean Being? One who should be clothed  
 With dignity befitting his proud hope;  
 Who, in his very childhood, should appear  
 Sublime—from present purity and joy!  
 The limbs increase; but, liberty of mind  
 Thus gone for ever, this organic Frame,  
 Which from heaven's bounty we receive, instinct  
 With light, and gladsome motions, soon becomes  
 Dull, to the joy of her own motions dead;  
 And even the Touch, so exquisitely poured  
 Through the whole body, with a languid Will  
 Performs its functions; rarely competent  
 To impress a vivid feeling on the mind  
 Of what there is delightful in the breeze,  
 The gentle visitations of the sun,  
 Or lapse of liquid element—by hand,  
 Or foot, or lip, in summer's warmth—perceived.  
 —Can hope look forward to a manhood raised  
 On such foundations?

(VIII, 318–337)

A society which abuses its children in such a manner, preventing them from enjoying their childhood in a natural and healthy way has created for itself a sad future. This new system is not just a threat to children's mental and physical health: it threatens to destroy many a good tradition in society too. A lot of the practices and values people held dear have either disappeared or are on the brink of extinction: the 'old domestic morals of the land,' 'simple manners,' 'peace,' 'sobriety,' 'order,' 'chaste love,' 'honest dealing,' 'untainted speech,' 'pure good-will,' and 'hospitable cheer' are all

being gradually rendered obsolete (VIII, 238–244). Families are being ripped apart by the need for the younger members to work, which has resulted in the disintegration of the traditional family. This is because the ‘mother’ is often being ‘left alone,—no helping hand/To rock the cradle of her peevish babe;/No daughters round her, busy at the wheel,’ as was the old custom, ‘no nice arts/Of needle—work; no bustle at the fire,/Where once the dinner was prepared with pride’ (VIII, 269–275). The father too ‘goes to field or wood,/No longer led or followed by his Sons’ (VIII, 278–280). This view of the effects of industrialization is contested by the Solitary, who interrupts the Wanderer at certain points of his talk to offer his own interpretation. He, for instance, points out that the rural poor had suffered in the past despite the fact that their lives close to nature were not disturbed (VIII, 336–337). Some had poor housing—‘crazy huts/And tottering hovels’—and were even reduced to begging (VIII, 349–350). Even those who were more fortunate (line 392 ff.), having all their basic needs met and working in the fields, still lacked education. ‘What liberty of *mind* is here?’ the Solitary asks at the end of his argument (VIII, 436).

When the three men are invited to go into the Pastor’s house, the narrative takes on a nicer tone as the clergyman’s house and family are described, making it clear that the children here are being properly cared for, well educated and close to nature. When the debate resumes between the Wanderer and the Solitary, the former expresses his belief in ‘An *active* principle’ (IX, 3) which runs through both nature and man and which offers promise for future social improvements by causing people to be in harmony with nature again. This contention probably arises from the Wanderer’s special bond with nature ever since he was a child, which also explains the importance of finding the divine in nature in his arguments with the Solitary. This ‘*active* principle’ operates through the fusion of mind and nature, a state that Jonathan

Wordsworth describes as the ‘wedding between the mind and “the external world”’ through ‘a common life–force’.<sup>37</sup> As is usually the case, the idealism of the Wanderer is checked by the more pessimistic realism of the Solitary, arguing that the poorest and most ignorant do not have the capacity to raise themselves (IX, 139-153). There follows further discussion of the need for education and opportunity for the young in Britain as a whole, which uses the children of the Pastor’s house – both the Pastor’s son and the less privileged guest present there at the time – as examples of children enjoying both education, or the ‘liberty of *mind*’ alluded to by the Solitary before, and freedom in nature (IX, 254-288).

Grasmere, then, is seen as a healthy, living place where the harms of industrialization and modernity may be offset through the opportunity such a nurturing community offers for an organic growth in nature accompanied by good education. This view of Grasmere reflects a belief Wordsworth expresses in ‘Michael,’ which is also a poem about the effects of modernity and industrialization on both man and nature. As ‘Michael’ shows, Wordsworth maintains that the north of Britain still retains the strong communal and family ties which once marked life in this country as a whole. *The Excursion* could thus be read as an attempt on the poet’s part to protect society in general, and the northern British regions in particular, from the forces of modernization. Wordsworth adopts a very similar approach in ‘Michael,’ in which the family of the shepherd Michael stands for a set of values and a way of life prevalent in a community on its way to annihilation. Once this community collapses the social structure of the whole country will have completely given way to modernizing powers. I follow in my reading of ‘Michael’ the tradition established by Geoffrey Hartman whereby Michael is partly viewed as a victim of the negative

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 213.

offshoots of the Industrial Revolution's 'divorcing man from the earth as effectively as a debased supernaturalism'.<sup>38</sup> Carl Woodring was another early proponent of this reading, arguing that the tale of Michael 'inevitably implies that something is wrong with a world where Michael had open to him only the gamble of sending Luke', his only son, away to an unknown and treacherous world.<sup>39</sup> Other critics partly blame Michael for his plight, arguing, for example, that the shepherd's choice to send Luke away was 'the wrong choice for reasons that are partially selfish but hardly evil; his motives are understandable and forgivable, but they are flawed'.<sup>40</sup> Some critics even go as far as claiming that the way Michael raised his son was wrong, questioning 'the inevitable moral supremacy of Michael and view[ing] a little more skeptically the love which motivates him'.<sup>41</sup> Although I maintain that Michael is partly to blame for what happened to his family by accepting to mortgage his land, I differ with critics adopting such a severe view of Michael which disregards the gravity of the forces driving him to choose to send his son away.

In the Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth explains why he wrote 'Michael': 'I have attempted to give a picture of man, of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart; the parental affection, and the love of property, *landed* property, including the feelings of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence.'<sup>42</sup> In a letter to Charles James Fox dated January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1801, Wordsworth further elaborates the

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<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 262.

<sup>39</sup> Carl Woodring, *Wordsworth* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> Tracy Ware, 'Historicism Along and Against the Grain: The Case of Wordsworth's "Michael"' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 49 (1994), 360–374 (p. 373).

<sup>41</sup> Sheldon Halpern, "'Michael', Wordsworth's pastoral of Common Man', *Notre Dam English Journal*, 8 [1972], 22–33. For a similar position see also John P. Bushnell, "'Where is the Lamb for a Burnt Offering?': Michael's Covenant and Sacrifice', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 12 (1981), 246–52. Bushnell likens Michael to an Abraham who sacrifices his son to regain his solitude.

<sup>42</sup> *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, The Early Years, 1787–1805, rev. C. L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), P. 322.



reasons he wrote 'Michael' and specifies the place where the values the shepherd epitomized are still to be found: 'in [...] "Michael" I have attempted to draw a picture of the domestic affections as I know they exist amongst a class of men who are now almost confined to the North of England.'<sup>43</sup> Those domestic affections which have held the community together for so long were under direct attack, which threatened the very existence of this community in its current form,

It appears to me that the most calamitous effect, which has followed the measures which have lately been pursued in this country, is a rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society [...] Parents are separated from their children, and children from their parents; the wife no longer prepares with her own hands a meal for her husband, the produce of his labour; there is little doing in his house in which his affections can be interested, and but little left in it which he can love.<sup>44</sup>

It seems that Wordsworth understood the importance of enjoying the fruits of one's own independent labour as this creates a connection between the maker and his own creation, allowing for a sense of love and contentment which mainly stems from the dignity such an independent life-style promotes. The poet also stresses, for the development of a sense of one's place in the world and in nature, the importance of communal, especially domestic, life, as that which, through the affections, can produce a sense of self-reliant rootedness, which he increasingly sees as necessary for an individual identity and appreciation of nature.

Wordsworth is specific about location in 'Michael'. The sheepfold is to be found 'beside the brook' of 'Green-head Gill' which one can reach if 'from the public

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, P. 314.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp. 313-314.

way [one] turns [one's] steps/Up the tumultuous brook' (1–2, 16).<sup>45</sup> In fact, the name of the brook 'of Green-head Gill' is further mentioned twice in the poem, as if Wordsworth wanted to forever link the place with the memory of Michael in his readers' minds, thus giving the shepherd a place he could call his own after he had lost his land. By the end of the poem, the repetition of the name of Green-head Gill works like a knell, bringing to mind sad associations of the broken covenant between father and son, and the ensuing devastation of everything Michael held so dear. The location of the shepherd's cottage is also described in detail: it stood 'upon the Forest-side in Grasmere Vale', with 'large prospect North and South,/High into Easedale, up to Dunmal-Raise,/And Westward to the village near the Lake' (40, 140–142).

Michael and his family were an example of the self-reliance lamented by Wordsworth in his letter quoted earlier. They made their own food: 'each with a mess of pottage and skimmed-milk' sat at the dinner table 'round their basket piled with oaten cakes/And their plain home-made cheese' (102–104). Isabel also worked to help her husband, and made clothes for her family on her two wheels, 'this large for spinning wool,/That small for flax, and if one wheel had rest,/It was because the other was at work' (84–87). Michael built his own buildings: 'before he heard/The tidings of his melancholy loss,' Michael 'had designed/To build a Sheep-fold,' and 'for this same purpose he had gathered up/A heap of stones' (333–337). This independence meant that the family was free from all forms of control represented by market-based forces. Money was of little consequence for this household as they were the owners of their cottage, sheep, and land passed down from generation to generation.

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<sup>45</sup> 'Michael: A Pastoral Poem' in Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, p. 224. All subsequent references to 'Michael' are from this edition.

This tough yet innocent and loving life is portrayed by Wordsworth as a living, integral and organic whole which has been developed slowly over a long period of time. When this way of life is completely destroyed by the end of the poem, there remains a very significant emblem of it: an oak tree left standing on the land where it has been standing for decades, and to whose soil and rocks its roots held on so firmly. Michael's life was so similar to this tree: he had roots in the land he lived in, roots which went back for generations, getting deeper and deeper with the coming of every new generation. Like the tree, too, taking the land away from Michael meant his death. In fact, Michael's identity could be seen to be wrapped up in the land itself, causing him to die slowly when the land was no longer free after Luke ran away. This view is further reinforced through the shepherd's portrayal as having some attributes traditionally associated with women, especially his love for, and nursing of, his son, which is depicted as exceeding what fathers usually feel or do for their children,

For oftentimes  
 Old Michael, while [Luke] was a babe in arms,  
 Had done him female service, not alone  
 For dalliance and delight, as is the use  
 Of Fathers, but with patient mind enforced  
 To acts of tenderness; and he had rocked  
 His cradle with a woman's gentle hand.

(162–168)

Michael has some important maternal qualities: love, patience, and tenderness. He is like a mother giving herself up completely to her baby and to serving it. By equating Michael with femininity, Wordsworth is also equating him with the life-giving power which only women and the earth have. Patiently, lovingly and gently land yields its produce in an act of miraculous creation. It could be argued that Michael's own act of

creation: begetting Luke at a late age, which has led some readers to compare Michael and Luke with Abraham and Isaac, could be seen as a similar slow, patient and loving act of fructification.<sup>46</sup> Identifying Michael with the earth could also be seen in the fact that all his forebears have lived on the same land and were buried in it, thus allowing their own blood to run through its soil.

What Michael represented was more than just a way of life devastated by external power: his lifestyle was an organic living being devoured by a merciless monster which worked its way gradually through all that was dear to the old shepherd. Michael's cottage was like a busy bee in its continuous industry: Isabel, 'whose heart was in her house,' ceaselessly worked at her wheels and did her daily chores while her husband and son worked in the fields. Once the family has had dinner, Michael and Luke

Betook themselves  
To such convenient work, as might employ  
Their hands by the fire-side; perhaps to card  
Wool for the House-wife's spindle, or repair  
Some injury done to sickle, flail, or scythe,  
Or other implement of house or field.

(106–111)

The image of the cottage as a living being becomes more apparent in Wordsworth's next lines. While the men were thus employed around the cottage Isabel 'late into the night/ [...] Plied her own peculiar work,/Making the cottage thro' the silent

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<sup>46</sup> Most readers of the poem use the fact that Michael had Luke at a late age, along with some other elements in the poem, to draw a comparison between 'Michael' and Biblical patriarchs. Harold Bloom describes the poem as 'the most directly Biblical of Wordsworth's poems' in *The Visionary Company* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 182. Hartman similarly argues that the story of Michael is a retelling of that of Abraham and Isaac, *Wordsworth's Poetry*, p. 265. Claire Lamont points out that the phrase 'mess of pottage' comes from the biblical story of Esau and Jacob in some of the earlier English translations of Genesis 25:29–34. 'Wordsworth and the Romantic Cottage' in *Grasmere 2009: Selected Papers from the Wordsworth Summer Conference*, ed. by Richard Gravil (Humanities - Ebooks.co.uk, 2009), p. 100.

hours/Murmur as with the sound of summer flies' (127–130). The cottage, just like a glow-worm, was lit by a lamp so late at night that it became known as 'the Evening Star', a star whose light guides people who have lost their way travelling at night. This living unit of content, loving, busy people, spinning wheels, and constantly glowing lamp could be seen as an extension of the life force which runs like a breeze through Michael, his land, the winds, Isabel, Luke. Michael is described in the poem as being able to understand the language of the wind and listen to its music (48–52). Once this '*active* principle' -- referred to previously by the Wanderer -- which operates within this little organic cell, is destroyed by splitting up the family and subjecting it to major market forces, all its components are affected and gradually die.

This autonomy and communal interdependence which marked Michael's life - - his community was clearly self-sufficient -- was usurped by an outside force much stronger than itself. Change is introduced into this free, historically established agrarian lifestyle in the form of a 'surety' by which Michael 'had been bound/[...] For his Brother's Son' for a long time (219–221). It is not known what made Michael act as his nephew's guarantor, but it was probably at that particular moment when Michael agreed to this that his downfall began. His land, which has always been free, stopped being so and was rather bound to the fluctuations and fortune changes characteristic of international markets. Michael admitted to his wife the importance of owning a free land: 'the land/Shall not go from us, and it shall be free,/He shall possess it, free as is the wind/That passes over it' (254–257). By using his land as 'surety' for his nephew's projects, regardless of how noble this act may have been, Michael has probably taken the first step toward breaking the covenant he had with his forefathers. He gambled with the land his ancestors had given everything they had for, and 'were not loth/To give their bodies to' when it was time for them to go (379–

380). This view is shared by Tracy Ware, who also holds that Michael has broken ‘the covenant between the living and the dead’, albeit differently: he did so by sending Luke to ‘the dissolute city.’<sup>47</sup> It follows from this that the covenant between Michael and Luke was already weak when first formed as it was not based on solid foundations, hence its inability to stand in the face of the monster the old shepherd let into his own land. When Michael decided that he was not going to sell part of his land to ‘discharge the forfeiture’, and that he was rather sending Luke to work with ‘another Kinsman’ who was ‘thriving in trade,’ he was unknowingly sealing his fate by engaging in modern capitalism, partly based on waged labour, or servitude (260–261). This decision heralded the end of Michael’s way of life and, ironically, simultaneously lost him the two things he tried to save by sending Luke away: his son and his land.

It was in the city that Luke lost his independence and identity and became part of a very different system than the one operating in his native region: he was now a slave to paid labour in a place where there is no self-reliance and communal living. Luke was no longer free. He was in the grip of an alienating system full of temptation, and it was not long before he succumbed to this temptation: he began to ‘slacken in his duty, and at length/He in the dissolute city gave himself/To evil courses’, with the inevitable result that ‘ignominy and shame/Fell on him, so that he was driven at last/To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas’ (452–456).

Thus was this happy, humble family destroyed: the Evening Star was brought down and the land sold when both Michael and Isabel died. Before this happened, Michael lived in dignified pain for seven years following his son’s disappearance. His final act of patient creation which especially required hope in the future was never

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<sup>47</sup> Ware, p. 372.

completed: he visited the sheepfold regularly but ‘never lifted up a single stone’ (475). Luke brought this hope into his father’s life when he was born, and he took it away when he left never to return or honour the covenant between them. When Isabel passed away some three years after her husband, the act of usurpation of this agrarian way of life was completed, and all that was left of it was the symbolic oak tree and an unfinished sheepfold representing the power of change which was much stronger than a covenant between father and son.

The sad ending to Michael’s family and way of life has been read differently by critics. Roger Sales criticises the poem’s ending,

The cottage which was named The Evening Star  
Is gone, the ploughshare has been through the ground  
On which it stood; great changes have been wrought  
In all the neighbourhood, yet the Oak is left  
That grew beside their Door; and the remains  
Of the unfinished Sheep-fold may be seen  
Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head-Gill

(485-91)

He recognises that it is a ‘requiem’;<sup>48</sup> but that term is not a compliment in Sales’ view. In his chapter on ‘William Wordsworth and the Real Estate’ Sales finds fault with Wordsworth for accepting the unhistorical traditions of pastoral, enabling him to protect his friendship with aristocratic benefactors like the Lowthers by avoiding in his poem the economic realities of Lake District rural life. Sales points out that ‘ploughshares do not drive themselves’ (although many readers will have attributed the task to the ‘Stranger’s hand’ in l. 484. He concludes by claiming that the passage ‘proves a good example of the way in which Wordsworth is unwilling to commit

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<sup>48</sup> Roger Sales, *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p. 55.

himself even to general propositions about economic agency in relation to the internal structure of rural society'.<sup>49</sup>

A few years later another historicist critic, Marjorie Levinson, produced an entirely different reading of the final lines of 'Michael', stating,

The ploughshare has been through the ground/ ...great changes have been wrought/

In all the neighbourhood" .... With this announcement, the narrator instructs the reader in the kind of victory accomplished by Michael's ordeal, and therefore in the sort of pleasure to be derived from the poem and from the situation it represents.

Michael's grazing lands have been brought under cultivation and thus brought within the embrace of the village, the world of the market. The shepherd's way of life – primitive, insular, lonely, concrete – has been ploughed under. A new and ostensibly higher social form – gregarious, fluid, and figurative – replaces and revises Michael's existence.<sup>50</sup>

This reading is unexpectedly celebratory and does not seem to have persuaded many readers who have usually taken the conclusion of 'Michael' to be particularly sad.

Claire Lamont, for example, views this stance as being 'at odds with the mood of the poem', pointing out the fact that one could 'read the total destruction of Michael and Isabel's cottage as the culmination of the theme of economic loss in the poem'. This utter annihilation of the 'Evening Star', Lamont adds, 'appears to operate in longer traditions than those of the industrial innovations of the eighteenth century'. It harks back to the sense of life's brevity and transience expressed in 'Psalm 103: "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field as he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more"'.<sup>51</sup>

Michael's 'true and unshakably firm covenant' is with 'a way of life, a way of life for

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<sup>49</sup> p. 55.

<sup>50</sup> Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> Lamont, 'Wordsworth and the Romantic Cottage', p. 99.



which he has worked hard for more than three quarters of a century'.<sup>52</sup> The poem's tragic finale puts an end to this covenant which, like all other covenants in the shepherd's life, were doomed to be broken because of forces his little family and property could not contend with.

This chapter has thrown light on Wordsworth's conviction that the alienating forces of modernity and industrialization can only be overcome by achieving a collective bond between man and nature, such as the one that had already been established in Grasmere in particular and the north of Britain in general. The strong unity that exists among the people of Grasmere on the one hand, and between them and nature on the other is exemplary, and is the only cure for a society as afflicted as modern society is. As this way of life itself is endangered, the poet tries to warn others about the threats it is facing in 'Michael'. It is in 'Michael' as well as *The Excursion* that Wordsworth expresses his stress on the importance of community in one's understanding of one's place in the world and within nature. Such a community allows the individual to grow, maintaining his rootedness through domestic affections and the flourishing sense of the self.

The strong oneness prevalent in Grasmere is brought to light in the revelation experienced by the entire group in *The Excursion*, which is one of the few visions experienced by more than one person in Wordsworth's poetry. The move from the first vision witnessed by the Solitary alone to the second one he witnessed as part of the group is suggestive of Wordsworth's evolving understanding of nature: like Scott, he now imbues nature with a more social identity, showing that he too holds that the modern age brings challenges too great for individuals to take on alone. This social understanding of nature, however, is still slightly more internally based in

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<sup>52</sup> Bushnell, p. 247.

Wordsworth's case, for even when nature is guiding the whole group to an understanding of God, she does so through a revelation which each member experiences as an individual within a group.

## Chapter 5

### Wordsworth, Scott, and the Yarrow

#### Introduction to the Yarrow Poems

Wordsworth tended to visit certain places more than once, especially those which had a hold on his feelings and imagination. ‘Tintern Abbey,’ for example, was composed when he revisited the Wye Valley in 1798, five years after he laid eyes on it for the first time. The earlier Wye visit was never similarly immortalized in a separate poem, and Wordsworth’s only references to it occur in ‘Tintern Abbey’ itself. These references either take the form of generic descriptions of the scene, such as ‘steep and lofty cliffs,’ ‘orchard-tufts,’ ‘hedge-rows,’ ‘pastoral farms/Green to the very door’ (5-18), or of a highly personal account of the way the poet was at the time of the visit – a ‘roe’ running around in nature, which was to him then ‘An appetite: a feeling and a love’ (68-81).

The Yarrow poems originate in Wordsworth’s repeated visits to the Yarrow River in the Anglo-Scottish Borders. His poetic treatment of the place is different from that resulting from his visiting the Wye more than once. The poet not only wrote two separate poems to mark both visiting and revisiting the Scottish river: he also composed a third poem celebrating a pre-visit. When Wordsworth and Dorothy were in the vicinity of the Yarrow during their 1803 Scottish tour, they opted against seeing the river for several reasons. ‘Yarrow Unvisited’ (1807) was the result of this non-visit. ‘Yarrow Visited’ (1815), the second of the Yarrow poems, celebrates

Wordsworth's first encounter with the Yarrow Valley, and 'Yarrow Revisited' (1835) tells of the time poet and river met again.<sup>1</sup>

The friendship between Wordsworth and Walter Scott played a major role in the composition of the Yarrow poems. Wordsworth tells Scott that he 'wrote [Yarrow Unvisited], not without a view of pleasing [him], soon after [the Wordsworths'] return from Scotland.'<sup>2</sup> Scott and his *Lay* are referred to in 'YV', whereas 'YR' revolves almost entirely around Scott's declining health. The three poems are all ballad imitations too: they have ballad meter and rhyme scheme, and, most importantly, they have as their setting the Yarrow River, which is a famous landmark in Border Ballads. The link with Scott is again clear here in view of his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Wordsworth's love for the region and the Yarrow River was inseparable from his love for his friend who embodied all that had to do with the Borders. Dorothy reports in her journal how everyone knew and loved Scott wherever in the area he accompanied her and her brother. Scott's attachment to the region he chose to live in for the most part of his life was very strong. In fact, Scott's heart and soul, Dorothy tells a friend, are wholly 'devoted to the Scottish streams, Yarrow and Tweed, Tiviot and the rest of them, of which [they] hear in the Border Ballads.'<sup>3</sup> Despite the major role Scott plays in the three poems – both directly and indirectly – few critics seem to take account of his influence on them. Some scholars have given attention to the ballads which Wordsworth's Yarrow poems refer to, but few of them have attempted to relate these poems to Scott, especially in the case of 'YU' and 'YV'. Ronald Schleifer, for example, provides a reading of all the Yarrow poems, looking at them

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<sup>1</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Poems*, pp. 290-92, 335-38, and 365-68. 'Yarrow Unvisited,' 'Yarrow Visited,' and 'Yarrow Revisited' will be henceforth referred to as 'YU,' 'YV,' and 'YR.'

<sup>2</sup> William Wordsworth to Walter Scott, 16 January [1805], *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. I, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt, rev. by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 530.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont, 4 May 1805, *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 590.

from the point of view of repetition, continuity – or the lack of it – of the self and poetic vision imbedded in them.<sup>4</sup> He briefly discusses the ballad sources of ‘YU,’ but completely ignores Scott’s influence on the poem. In another sustained study of the sequence Toru Soeda briefly mentions Scott and the ballads referred to in the three poems as part of his overall theme. His main aim is to explicate the way Wordsworth’s imagination works through an analysis of his employment of the image of the Yarrow in the three poems.<sup>5</sup> Soeda notes how objects experienced through the senses are given meanings by the imagination, which then turns them into poetic ideas.

This chapter examines whether or not Wordsworth’s treatment of, and views on, nature change in poems he wrote about places located outside the Lake District. The Yarrow poems are heavily influenced by Scott, and are set in Scott’s own terrain. It is therefore through the investigation of Scott’s influence on the three poems that this chapter seeks to show the manner in which Wordsworth tackled the concept of nature when connected with a locale and culture slightly different from his own. Whether or not this shift in perspective has a direct effect on the assumption that Wordsworth viewed nature as a force operating primarily within solitary individuals will be looked at too.

This chapter also attempts to place the Yarrow poems within the framework of Scott’s close affinity with both the Anglo-Scottish Borders and their ballads. Wherever possible, I attempt to read the poems in light of the ballads associated with them, giving especial attention to nature and its representation in the three poems.

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Schleifer, ‘Wordsworth’s Yarrow and the Poetics of Repetition’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 38 (1977), 348-66.

<sup>5</sup> Toru Soeda, ‘On Wordsworth’s Yarrow Poems’, in Kenkishi Kamijima and Yasuo Denguchi, eds, *Centre and Circumference: Essays in English Romanticism* (Tokyo: Kiriara, for the Association of English Romanticism in Japan, 1995), pp. 199-211.

As the titles of the three Yarrow poems suggest, Wordsworth thought of them as a sequence. The headnote to 'YR' announces that 'the title *Yarrow Revisited* will stand in no need of explanation, for Readers acquainted with the Author's previous poems suggested by that celebrated Stream.'<sup>6</sup> Despite this link among the poems which Wordsworth hints at himself, relatively few attempts at a sustained study of the poems together exist. Critics do not seem to follow Wordsworth's example in treating the poems as a unit, but the poet's attitude on another matter seems to have proven more influential. Of those scholars who tackle the Yarrow poems together, and sometimes separately, most tend to give the least attention, and reference, to 'YV', which is generally regarded as the weakest in the group. Johnston, for example, thinks the poem a 'tepid tribute of scene-painting'<sup>7</sup> and Alexander considers it to be of an 'inferior quality' to its sisters.<sup>8</sup> Wordsworth seems to have contributed to this trend by stating that 'second parts, if much inferior to the first, are always disgusting, and as [he] had succeeded in *Yarrow Unvisited*, [he] was anxious that there should be no falling off; but that was unavoidable, perhaps, from the subject.'<sup>9</sup> This chapter will also offer a balanced and equal reading of the three poems which, by uncovering the sophisticated nature and intricacy of 'YV,' proves its importance in the Wordsworthian canon. I will first look briefly into ballad history and the main Yarrow ballads, thus placing the tradition within the larger picture of the Border landscape, before offering a discussion of the Yarrow poems.

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<sup>6</sup> Head note to 'YR,' *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, p.365.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth* (London: Norton, 1998), p 576.

<sup>8</sup> J. H. Alexander, 'To Visit or Not to Visit? The Yarrow Question in the "Lay" and "Marmion"', in *Scott and his Influence*, ed. by J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1983), p 31.

<sup>9</sup> William Wordsworth to R. P. Gillies, 23 November 1814, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. III, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt, rev. by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 169-70.

### The Yarrow valley and its reputation in ballads

The Yarrow River flows into the larger border river of the Ettrick, which in turn flows into the Tweed, the main river of the borders. In the upper reaches of the Yarrow are two lakes, St Mary's lake, and the Loch of the Lowes.

The Yarrow valley is mainly associated with melancholy, tragic, and romantic stories kept alive and handed down from generation to generation through the oral tradition of the ballad. Ballads started to gain popularity in literary circles in the eighteenth century when several collections were published, the first of which being Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* followed in 1802-03, and was the first to talk about the rich ballad tradition of the Borders, which was very little known before he drew attention to it.

The main Yarrow ballad first appeared in print in the 'Romantic Ballads' section of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* under the title 'The Dowie Dens of Yarrow.'<sup>10</sup> 'Den' in Scots is a narrow valley, and 'dowie' means 'dismal.'<sup>11</sup> The ballad is no. 214 in F. J. Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*.<sup>12</sup> Scott's introduction to the ballad starts

This ballad, which is a very great favourite among the inhabitants of Ettrick Forest, is universally believed to be founded in fact. The editor found it easy to collect a variety of copies; but very difficult, indeed, to select from them [...]<sup>13</sup>

The copy that Scott printed had been sent to him by fellow-Borderer and poet, James Hogg (1770-1835).<sup>14</sup> The 'Dowie Dens of Yarrow' is a tale of love, faithfulness,

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1803), Vol. III, pp. 72-78.

<sup>11</sup> *The Concise Scots Dictionary*, ed. by Mairi Robinson (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), pp. 141, 158.

<sup>12</sup> F. J. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols, 1884-98 (New York: Dover, 1965), Vol. IV, pp. 160-68.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (London: Harrap, 1931), p. 402.

<sup>14</sup> Child, Vol. IV, p. 163.

bravery, and betrayal. It tells of a brave knight who is challenged to a duel by his brother-in-law. The knight's in-laws 'are at variance with [him]' because his wife's brothers deem him an unsuitable match for her.<sup>15</sup> He fights nine armed men on the banks of the Yarrow, killing five and wounding the rest, but receives a cowardly fatal blow from behind. When the wife learns about this she rushes to the river: 'She kissed his cheek, she kaimed his hair' – the same things which she had done just before he left for the duel. This simple act of love and tenderness connects life with death, and shows the continuity of love and that it will live on even after death has parted the two lovers. Similarly, as will be made clear when discussing the poem, the male speaker in Wordsworth's 'YU' tells his beloved that the love and admiration they have for the Yarrow will live on in their hearts (54-55) even though they have not actually laid eyes on the stream. Through its absence, the river will be fully present in their hearts. This presence is going to sustain them in the years to come (61-62) as the love for her late husband sustains the woman in the ballad despite physical separation.

As a result of the growing interest in the ballad tradition, ballad imitations flourished in the eighteenth century. A Scottish poet called William Hamilton of Bangour (1704-1754) wrote an imitation of the Yarrow ballad and published it in Allan Ramsay's *The Tea-Table Miscellany* under the name 'The Braes of Yarrow' in 1730.<sup>16</sup> It became more widely known when Percy included it in his influential *Reliques*.<sup>17</sup> This ballad is a particularly strong influence on Wordsworth's Yarrow poems, especially 'YU', as he himself tells his readers in a note preceding his poem.<sup>18</sup> True to the original, Hamilton's ballad is both romantic and tragic, and tells of love, murder, and a faithfulness which transcends the boundaries between life and death

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>16</sup> Murray G. H. Pittock, 'Hamilton, William, of Bangour (1704-1754)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ><http://www.oxforddnb.com><, accessed 11 April 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 3 vols (London, 1765), Vol.II, pp. 361-66.

<sup>18</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Poems*, p. 290.



and opens the doors into the supernatural realm where the two lovers can be together forever. 'YU' also deals with a similar duality between reality and the supernatural world. I shall explore this point further when giving an in-depth discussion of Wordsworth's poem below.

'The Braes of Yarrow' is narrated through a conversation between three characters: a murderer, a girl who was in love with the killer's victim, and a third character who asks the criminal questions in order to make certain ambiguities clearer in the minds of readers. The murderer here is not related to the woman: he is someone who was in love with her and wanted to marry her despite the fact that she was in love with another man, a 'comely swain.'<sup>19</sup> The woman's family were opposed to the love affair because of the modest origins of the man she loved, and they conspired to put an end to the relationship. 'YU' both acknowledges the fame of the Yarrow gained through such complex and tragic stories as the ballads depict, and portrays a more peaceful time when not only people, but also animals, enjoy a safe normal life (9-12, 41-42). 'YV' also celebrates the fact that those brutal days are no more and that peace and quiet prevail on the banks of the Yarrow (30). More importantly, lovers can now establish peaceful homes where family life can blossom (57-64). In the violent times described in Hamilton of Bangour's ballad the heroine's 'barbarous barbarous father,' 'happy sisters' and 'brother Douglas' apparently planned with the murderer to kill the girl's lover and marry her off to the conspirator. The killer tries to convince the girl to forget about her now dead lover and marry him because he loved her as much as the other man did, or perhaps more. She refuses and vows to remain loyal forever to the man she loved, thus bringing back his ghost from the dead. She speaks to the ghost:

Pale tho' thou art, yet best yet best beluv'd,

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<sup>19</sup> 'The Braes of Yarrow' in *The Literary Ballad*, ed. by Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), pp. 21-25, line 31.

O could my warmth to life restore thee,  
 Yet lye all night between my briests,  
 No youth lay ever there before thee.

(109-12)

The murderer's response is to claim that her attempts at communicating with her lover are in vain: he 'heeds nought of thy sighs,/He lyes a corps on the Braes of Yarrow' (119-20). The male and female speakers in 'YU' show a similar degree of lack of understanding and communication, especially when the poet rejects his companion's request to go see the river without giving any convincing reasons for his refusal. The poem, however, ends with the man becoming more understanding and empathetic toward the girl, thus consequently changing his attitude; his counterpart in the ballad doesn't change his.

### **The Wordsworths' First Scottish Tour, and 'Yarrow Unvisited'**

It was during his first tour of the Scottish Highlands that Wordsworth met Scott for the first time, as I have already shown in the Introduction. William, Dorothy and Coleridge set off to discover the Highlands on the morning of Monday 15 August 1803. They spent the first two weeks exploring the region together before Coleridge decided to leave them and go his own way on 29 August 1803. The Wordsworths returned home on Sunday 25 September. The first meeting between Wordsworth and Scott took place on 17 September at the latter's residence in Lasswade.<sup>20</sup> In the week to follow Scott acted as a guide showing his guests around and sharing with them his passion for his native region as well as his extensive historical and local knowledge of it.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2 vols, ed. by E. De Selincourt (London: Macmillan, 1959), Vol. I, p. 387.

Towards the end of the Scottish tour, William and Dorothy came close to the Yarrow valley, but decided against visiting it. Dorothy tells in the journals she kept of the tour how she and William preferred ‘reserving the pleasure for some future time.’<sup>21</sup> Many years later Wordsworth admitted to Isabella Fenwick that ‘[they] declined going in search of this celebrated stream, not altogether, [he] will frankly confess, for the reasons assigned in the poem on the occasion.’<sup>22</sup>

The visit to Scotland resulted in a collection of poems, all of which draw on first-hand experiences and direct contact with the places Wordsworth visited and the people he came into contact with, both directly and indirectly. ‘The Solitary Reaper,’ for example, draws in part on the Wordsworths’ experience of seeing single reapers in the Highlands, and the famous tributes to Robert Burns draw on Wordsworth’s visiting the grave and house of the famous Scottish author.<sup>23</sup> The only non-action resulting in the composition of a poem was the lack of a visit to the Yarrow. ‘YU’ was composed after the Wordsworths returned to Grasmere, in early or mid-November 1803. It was published on 28 April 1807 in *Poems, in Two Volumes*.<sup>24</sup>

#### Yarrow Unvisited

From Stirling Castle we had seen  
The mazy Forth unravelled;  
Had trod the banks of Clyde, and Tay,  
And with the Tweed had travelled;  
And, when we came to Clovenford,  
Then said my ‘winsome Marrow,’  
‘Whate’er betide, we’ll turn aside,  
And see the Braes of Yarrow.’

‘Let Yarrow Folk, *frae* Selkirk Town,  
Who have been buying, selling,  
Go back to Yarrow, ‘tis their own,  
Each Maiden to her Dwelling!  
On Yarrow’s Banks let herons feed,  
Hares couch, and rabbits burrow!  
But we will downwards with the Tweed,

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<sup>21</sup> Dorothy’s *Journals*, Vol. I, p. 391.

<sup>22</sup> William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems 1800-1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), note on p. 417.

<sup>23</sup> Dorothy’s *Journals*, Vol. I, pp. 380-81, 198-99; *Poems, in Two Volumes*, p. 415.

<sup>24</sup> *Poems, in Two Volumes*, p. 33.

Nor turn aside to Yarrow.

There's Galla Water, Leader Haughs,  
Both lying right before us;  
And Dryborough, where with chiming Tweed  
The Lintwhites sing in chorus; 20  
There's pleasant Tiviot Dale, a land  
Made blithe with plough and harrow;  
Why throw away a needful day  
To go in search of Yarrow?

What's Yarrow but a River bare,  
That glides the dark hills under?  
There are a thousand such elsewhere  
As worthy of your wonder.'  
—Strange words they seemed of slight and scorn;  
My True-love sighed for sorrow; 30  
And looked me in the face, to think  
I thus could speak of Yarrow!

'Oh! green,' said I, 'are Yarrow's Holms,  
And sweet is Yarrow flowing!  
Fair hangs the apple frae the rock,  
But we will leave it growing.  
O'er hilly path, and open Strath,  
We'll wander Scotland thorough;  
But, though so near, we will not turn  
Into the Dale of Yarrow. 40

Let Beeves and home-bred Kine partake  
The sweets of Burn-mill meadow;  
The Swan on still St. Mary's Lake  
Float double, Swan and Shadow!  
We will not see them; will not go,  
Today, nor yet tomorrow;  
Enough if in our hearts we know  
There's such a place as Yarrow.

Be Yarrow Stream unseen, unknown!  
It must, or we shall rue it: 50  
We have a vision of our own;  
Ah! why should we undo it?  
The treasured dreams of times long past  
We'll keep them, winsome Marrow!  
For when we're there although 'tis fair  
'Twill be another Yarrow!

If Care with freezing years should come,  
And wandering seem but folly,  
Should we be loth to stir from home,  
And yet be melancholy; 60  
Should life be dull, and spirits low,  
'Twill soothe us in our sorrow  
That earth has something yet to show,  
The bonny Holms of Yarrow!<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Poems*, pp. 290-92.

Scott played a role in the composition of 'YU.' His influence can be traced down to several factors. Wordsworth wanted to please his friend with a poem on the stream Scott loved dearly, as already pointed out. During the Wordsworths' first visit Scott also repeated to them a poem, 'Leader Haughs and Yarrow', commending the banks (haughs) of the Leader Water, a river flowing into the Tweed. Its first stanza, celebrating the sun, ends

Amongst all those he makes his choice,  
And with delight goes thorow,  
With radiant beams and silver streams,  
Are *Leader Haughs* and *Yarrow*.

(lines 5-8)

The place is mentioned in 'YU,' (17) and the poem, the work of 'minstrel Burn', was one which Wordsworth was very unlikely to have heard from anyone else.<sup>26</sup> Scott was also working on his *Lay* when the Wordsworths visited him. A poem partly about love, feud, courage and sacrifice, *The Lay* is a celebration of Border traditions and history, and of places rich in associations with the past. 'YU' is a similar celebration of a spot deeply rooted in history, and the poem's ballad form is a celebration of the famous Border tradition. *The Lay* also celebrates locality by mentioning a lot of place names. The most obvious manifestation of this is William of Deloraine's night ride discussed in Chapter 3. 'YU' echoes this by opening with a description of the route the narrator and his beloved had followed to Clovenford. This route is not detailed through the mention of the major cities and historic sites the couple had passed, but mainly by stating the names of rivers they had seen – the Forth, Clyde, Tay, and Tweed. The major influence on the poem, however, comes from the Yarrow ballads,

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<sup>26</sup> Allan Ramsay, *The Tea-Table Miscellany*, 10<sup>th</sup> edn ([London], 1740), pp. 179-81.

especially Hamilton of Bangour's 'The Braes of Yarrow,' and Wordsworth makes readers aware of this in the head note which invites them to,

(See the various Poems the scene of which is laid upon the Banks of the Yarrow; in particular, the exquisite Ballad of Hamilton beginning

'Busk ye, busk ye, my bonny, bonny Bride,

Busk ye, busk ye, my winsome Marrow!'—)<sup>27</sup>

This acknowledgement of the reputation the Yarrow enjoys in tradition makes it more surprising that the speaker in the poem, having visited some of the other important rivers in Scotland, refuses his 'winsome marrow's' request to go see the Yarrow when they are just a few miles away from it. The reasons he gives for his refusal are all unconvincing. Even promising his 'True-love' to go and see a group of other attractive places such as 'Galla Water, Leader Haughs,' and 'pleasant Tiviot-dale' proves no consolation for her (17, 21). She feels sad that her companion could show such disrespect for the Yarrow by saying that many other nice places still lie ahead of them to see and enjoy. All rivers are similar perhaps, but none of them is the Yarrow. The headnote to the poem shows just that: it provides both an explanation of the girl's insistence on going to see the river, and a reason for the man to refuse going there. The Yarrow is a river like all others, yet it is very different from them because none other enjoys its literary history and associations. The girl knows the Yarrow well because she has previously read about it in ballads, and that is why she is indignant when her lover shows his indifference towards it and says that seeing other places which lay ahead would make up for missing it. On the other hand, it is these associations which make the speaker want to put off the joy of seeing the Yarrow till later so that he does not spoil the imaginative picture he has of it, 'The treasured dreams of times long past,/We'll keep them, winsome Marrow!' (53-54) This is

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<sup>27</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Poems*, p. 290. 'Busk' means to get ready, or to get dressed.

because 'imagination almost always transcends reality' as Wordsworth declares.<sup>28</sup>

The knowledge that they have not yet ruined the mental image they have formed long ago of the Yarrow, and that there is still a place for them to discover later will sustain the lovers' hearts as they grow older.

The voice of the male speaker is the one the poem closes with. This is true of Hamilton's ballad too, both literally and metaphorically. This, however, seems to be only happening on the face of it. In Wordsworth's poem the girl keeps pleading with her lover to go and see the Yarrow, but he refuses, giving his reasons in a one-sided argument before he has his own way. In 'The Braes of Yarrow,' the murderer imposes his own will on the girl from the start, asking her to wear wedding clothes, wipe off her tears, and stop mourning the lover he had just killed as he was to marry her himself. The argument here too is one-sided, and the killer's inability to see what he has actually done, take responsibility for it, and understand the woman's feelings and state of mind goes as far as blaming his victim for what has happened,

Did I not warn thee not to, not to lue,  
And warn from fight, but to my sorrow,  
O'er rashly bald a stronger arm  
Thou met'st, and fell on the Braes of Yarrow  
(lines 45-48)

Here too the male character ignores the emotional significance attached to the Yarrow. In a manner similar to his male counterpart in 'YU', the killer mentions another attractive prospect which is as beautiful as the Yarrow, 'Flows Yarrow sweet? as sweet, as sweet flows Tweed' (53). He then asks the girl to forget both the Yarrow and her lover and go with him, 'Busk ye, and lue me on the banks of the Tweed,/And

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<sup>28</sup> William Wordsworth to R. P. Gillies, Nov. 23, 1814, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. III, p. 170.

think nae mair on the Braes of Yarrow' (63-64). The girl refuses this proposal and asserts that the only man she is marrying is the one she loves. This loyalty opens up the doors of the supernatural world and brings the spirit of the lover back to be with her, as mentioned before. Similarly, the loyalty of Wordsworth's female speaker to the Yarrow, and her insistence on seeing it, open the door to the world of imagination. It makes the male speaker admit that they can see the river's unreal image in their minds, and that it will live with them throughout their lives to give them strength and soothe them in distress. The existence of these parallel worlds in the two ballads, the real vs imaginative worlds in 'YU', and the natural vs supernatural worlds in 'The Braes of Yarrow' are echoed in the dual image in 'YU' of the swan on St Mary's Lake 'Floa[ting] double, Swan and Shadow!' (44). The defiance the female characters put up against the will of the male voices undermines the latters' authority and conjures up the parallel worlds in both poems, even when the male speakers are not aware of it. This is particularly the case in Hamilton's ballad, where the murderer ignores the fact that the girl can see her lover's ghost, and goes on to tell her to 'dry thy useless sorrow' as her 'luer heeds naught of [her] sighs' (118-19). Wordsworth's speaker does not share the same disregard for the girl's feelings. In the fifth stanza he changes his tone and stops attacking the river cruelly when the girl shows her uneasiness at what he has been saying, thus allowing the imaginative image of the Yarrow, and its existence in folklore and ancient ballads to replace the real image as the source of pleasure for the couple. The reasons the poet gives for not wanting to go to the place now are the true ones, but they do not exist in reality. They only exist in the imagination, 'Enough if in our hearts we know,/There's such a place as Yarrow' (47-48). The reasons he gave before, on the other hand, were immersed in the daily reality of the place, but they were not the genuine ones.



## Second Scottish Tour: 'Yarrow Visited'

Wordsworth's second Scottish tour took place in 1814. He set off from Grasmere with his wife, Mary, and her sister Sara Hutchinson on 18 July. They went through Carlisle to Brampton, Eskdale, Glasgow, Drymen, Aberfoyle, the Trossachs, Inverness and Edinburgh where they arrived on 25 August. On 1 September they went to see the Yarrow with James Hogg, who acted as their guide. Wordsworth reports that '[they] had lodged the night before at Traquhair where Hogg had joined [them].'<sup>29</sup> They went all the way up to the river's source then followed its course down to Newark Tower.<sup>30</sup> Wordsworth was apparently very impressed with the place and readily began to write a poem marking the visit. Sara Hutchinson noted in a letter to her sister the following day, 'yesterday we visited Yarrow & we shall soon have a poem *Yarrow Visited*.'<sup>31</sup>

Critics tend generally to view 'YV' in a negative light, dedicating the least space to discussing it compared with the other two Yarrow poems, as I have already pointed out. Wordsworth himself thought his poem inferior to 'YU' because it deals with reality whereas its predecessor deals with the imagination. What 'YV' itself seems to be saying is that reality can actually rival imagination and encompass it in one healing, wise view of the changing human life. Despite the unfavourable views of the poem, some critics were more sympathetic in their reading. Stephen Gill, for example, appreciates the poem's attempt at 'celebrating the actual beauty of the place,' regarding it 'amongst the most assured of the lyrics Wordsworth was able to add to his *Poems* (1815).'<sup>32</sup> I share common ground with Gill in regarding the poem as an 'assured' attempt on Wordsworth's part to showcase his philosophy of the

<sup>29</sup> William Wordsworth, *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*, ed. by Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 527. Wordsworth's recollection was recorded by Isabella Fenwick.

<sup>30</sup> Moorman, pp. 259-260.

<sup>31</sup> *Shorter Poems 1807-1820*, p. 527.

<sup>32</sup> Gill, p. 298.

dichotomy of loss and gain, both inevitable in life, and both possibly best dealt with when one learns how to look at them as a part of the long process of growth and getting old.

Scott's influence on 'YV' is less direct and obvious than the other two Yarrow poems, yet it is clear that Wordsworth associated the river with his friend. For although Scott was not with Wordsworth on the first visit the latter paid the Yarrow, Scott's influence is still present in the *Lay* and Border ballad allusions in 'YV.' Scott, however, did not only write about the Yarrow in the ballads. *The Lay* itself contains references to the stream, as does *Marmion* (1808). Newark Castle, the setting of the frame story in *The Lay* is at the mouth of the Yarrow water, and the poem mentions the lakes at the head of the Yarrow as the place where pilgrimage, feud and violence had resulted in the Scotts burning 'Mary's Chapel of the Lowes' (III, xxxiii). As I have already mentioned, the violence of the old world of the Border gives place to the conclusion of the minstrel's story, in which he settles into a 'simple hut' near Newark, 'And Yarrow, as he roll'd along/Bore burden to the Minstrel's song' (VI, xxxi). Scott also writes autobiographically about the Yarrow in the Introduction to the second canto of *Marmion*. He describes 'lone Saint Mary's silent lake' as a setting for 'musing on companions gone':

Nor fen, nor sedge,  
Pollute the pure lake's crystal edge;  
Abrupt and sheer, the mountains sink  
At once upon the level brink;  
And just a trace of silver sand  
Marks where the water meets the land.  
Far in the mirror, bright and blue,  
Each hill's huge outline you may view;

Shaggy with heath, but lonely bare

[...]

Yet even this nakedness has power,

And aids the feeling of the hour.<sup>33</sup>

He returns to the destruction of the chapel, updating the story:

Nought living meets the eye or ear,

But well I ween the dead are near;

For though, in feudal strife, a foe

Hath laid Our Lady's chapel low,

Yet still, beneath the hallow'd soil,

The peasant rests him from his toil,

And, dying, bids his bones be laid,

Where erst his simple fathers pray'd.<sup>34</sup>

'YV' was published in Wordsworth's *Poems* (1815).<sup>35</sup>

#### Yarrow Visited

And is this—Yarrow?—*This* the Stream  
Of which my fancy cherished,  
So faithfully, a waking dream?  
An image that hath perished!  
O that some Minstrel's harp were near,  
To utter notes of gladness,  
And chase this silence from the air,  
That fills my heart with sadness!

Yet why?—a silvery current flows  
With uncontrolled meanderings;  
Nor have these eyes by greener hills  
Been soothed, in all my wanderings.  
And, through her depths, Saint Mary's Lake  
Is visibly delighted;  
For not a feature of those hills  
Is in the mirror slighted.

10

A blue sky bends o'er Yarrow vale,  
Save where that pearly whiteness  
Is round the rising sun diffused,  
A tender, hazy brightness;  
Mild dawn of promise! that excludes

20

<sup>33</sup> Scott: *Poetical Works*, p. 102, col. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 103, col. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth: A Life*, p. 298.

All profitless dejection;  
 Though not unwilling here to admit  
 A pensive recollection.

Where was it that the famous Flower  
 Of Yarrow Vale lay bleeding?  
 His bed perchance was yon smooth mound  
 On which the herd is feeding:  
 And haply from this crystal pool,  
 Now peaceful as the morning, 30  
 The Water-wraith ascended thrice—  
 And gave his doleful warning.

Delicious is the Lay that sings  
 The haunts of happy Lovers,  
 The path that leads them to the grove,  
 The leafy grove that covers:  
 And Pity sanctifies the Verse  
 That paints, by strength of sorrow,  
 The unconquerable strength of love;  
 Bear witness, rueful Yarrow! 40

But thou, that didst appear so fair  
 To fond imagination,  
 Dost rival in the light of day  
 Her delicate creation:  
 Meek loveliness is round thee spread,  
 A softness still and holy;  
 The grace of forest charms decayed,  
 And pastoral melancholy.

That Region left, the Vale unfolds 50  
 Rich groves of lofty stature,  
 With Yarrow winding through the pomp  
 Of cultivated nature;  
 And, rising from those lofty groves,  
 Behold a Ruin hoary!  
 The shattered front of Newark's Towers,  
 Renowned in Border story.

Fair scenes for childhood's opening bloom,  
 For sportive youth to stray in;  
 For manhood to enjoy his strength;  
 And age to wear away in! 60  
 Yon Cottage seems a bower of bliss,  
 It promises protection  
 To studious ease, and generous cares,  
 And every chaste affection!

How sweet, on this autumnal day,  
 The wild wood's fruits to gather,  
 And on my True-love's forehead plant  
 A crest of blooming heather!  
 And what if I enwreathed my own! 70  
 'Twere no offence to reason;  
 The sober Hills thus deck their brows  
 To meet the wintry season.

I see—but not by sight alone,  
 Loved Yarrow, have I won thee;

A ray of fancy still survives—  
 Her sunshine plays upon thee!  
 Thy ever-youthful waters keep  
 A course of lively pleasure;  
 And gladsome notes my lips can breathe,  
 Accordant to the measure. 80

The vapours linger round the Heights,  
 They melt, and soon must vanish;  
 One hour is theirs, nor more is mine—  
 Sad thought, which I would banish,  
 But that I know, where'er I go  
 Thy genuine image, Yarrow!  
 Will dwell with me—to heighten joy,  
 And cheer my mind in sorrow.

As the opening lines of the poem suggest, the mental image Wordsworth has had of the river for so long ‘perished’ when he first looked at the place. This image was formed through his reading of Yarrow stories in ballads. However, the following lines challenge this claim by showing that the poet’s view of the river is still coloured by the literary associations of the place. He, for instance, announces that his eyes have never ‘by greener hills/Been soothed, in all my wanderings’. This is a probable reference to Hamilton’s ballad where the murderer says ‘green grows, green grows the grass’ of the Yarrow.<sup>36</sup> The poet also asks where the ‘famous Flower/Of Yarrow Vale lay bleeding?’ and adds that it was perhaps from a specific ‘crystal pool’ that ‘The Water-wraith ascended thrice—/And gave his doleful warning’. This is a reference to the ballad by John Logan (1748-88) also entitled ‘The Braes of Yarrow’ in which a woman relates how her lover’s body lay lifeless in the river -- perhaps drowned. She laments his untimely death that came one day before their proposed wedding, and says addressing the Yarrow,

Thou art to me a stream of sorrow;  
 For never on thy banks shall I  
 Behold my love, the flower of Yarrow.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> William Hamilton, ‘The Braes of Yarrow’ in *The Literary Ballad*, p. 23, line 49.

<sup>37</sup> John Logan, *Poems, by the Rev. Mr. Logan* (London, 1791), pp. 4-7, ‘The Braes of Yarrow’, lines 6-8. Accessed through *ECCO* on 12 December 2009.

This tragedy was anticipated by what the young woman saw minutes after her last meeting with her lover,

Scarce was he gone, I saw his ghost;  
 It vanish'd with a shriek of sorrow;  
 Thrice did the water-wraith ascend,  
 And gave a doleful groan thro' Yarrow.

(lines, 21-24)

The literary identity of the place is, then, still present strongly at the start of the poet's experience of the Yarrow Valley. This identity is one of tragedy and death, and it impresses the speaker's heart with such sadness that he asks for a minstrel's harp to play some happy tunes. The minstrel referred to here is evidently the ageing bard in Scott's *Lay*, and Wordsworth is calling upon him to tell the company happier stories, probably of lovers who used to walk the green banks of the river like Margaret and Henry, the two characters whose happy love story was celebrated in Scott's poem, did.

'YV' opens at daybreak, and as the poet explores his mental image of the river the sun begins to rise slowly, making it more difficult for Wordsworth's imagination to keep imposing its own vision on the scene. When it is finally daylight, the poet's imaginative picture is almost completely blurred, and he is able to see the place for what it really is, exclaiming matter-of-factly that the Yarrow 'rival[s] in the light of day' the 'delicate creation' of the imagination (43-44). This brings to mind the child of the 'Immortality Ode', who continues to lose his visionary powers as he grows older till he finally witnesses them disappear completely 'into the light of common day'.<sup>38</sup> The 'Ode' is partly about man's gradual acceptance of the loss of vision, and how memory takes over to make up for this loss. Similarly, the main theme of 'YV'

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<sup>38</sup> William Wordsworth: *The Major Poems*, pp. 297-302, line 76.

seems to be coming to terms with the fact that 'Yarrow-the-image' has become 'Yarrow-the-memory.'

Wordsworth's statement that the reality of what the Yarrow valley looks like is no less fair than its imaginative image challenges both the disappointment the poem exhibits in the first four lines, and Wordsworth's prediction that the poem would inevitably be less worthy than its predecessor due to the fact that reality can seldom be superior to imagination.

Now that the ideal picture of the river has been obliterated in Wordsworth's mind with the coming of day and he has come to terms with his loss, getting ready to look for an alternative to imagination, we are invited to see what the real scene unfolding in front of him is like. The poem shows this primarily by means of juxtaposition. The dichotomy 'reality/imagination' is played out in the lines that follow, and is particularly echoed in two images, which bring to mind the swan/shadow metaphor in 'YU'. First, there is in 'YV' the mirror image on St Mary's Lake, which, because of the stillness and clarity of the water, reflects all the 'feature[s] of those hills' surrounding it (13-16). Newark's Towers are another example. The setting of a story which took place a long time ago when they were inhabited by people and bustling with life, the towers are now but a 'Ruin hoary' with a 'shattered front' (54-56). The ruined castle stands in the midst of 'cultivated nature,' which may suggest civility, order, and peace – a far cry from the chaos and bloodshed which characterized society at the time the place was still being used. The banks of the Yarrow seem now to be well suited for a long, happy life. People are under no direct threat of violence and bloodshed, and can enjoy the promise of a long, safe, happy existence stretching from childhood to old age (57–60). Family life can prosper now too, and the inhabitants of 'yon cottage' in the valley, 'a bower of bliss' which

'promises protection' can enjoy it to the full (61-62). Life for Newark dwellers was completely different. They were forced by fear and constant threat to sleep clad in their armour, as 'Border story' relates (56). Life now is also very different from the superstitious, vengeful, and dangerous world the 'flower of Yarrow' and his beloved lived in. People then had far less security and were less happy, feeling none of the 'tender thoughts' and 'chaste affection' now prevailing (57-64).

The dichotomy between reality and imagination is also revealed in the way the poet describes the Yarrow through the employment of attributes which are perhaps difficult to grasp by imagination alone. For example, attention is drawn to the 'meek loveliness' of the river banks, their 'softness still and holy,' to the 'grace of forest charms decayed' (45-48). One has to be present in a place to feel the meekness of its beauty, to realise how quiet it actually is, and to see how this quiet serenity makes it soft, holy, graceful.

It is in such a safe, healthy environment that love can thrive properly, and the poet can 'plant' a 'crest of blooming heather' on his 'True-love's forehead' (67-68). This action harks back to the dream of the female character in Hamilton's ballad. She dreamt that she had 'pu'd the heather green/On the dowy banks o Yarrow,' and consequently feared that 'there wad be sorrow' (38-40). The fact that the heather was still green when she pulled it suggests the premature death of the lover, and indeed he goes to the banks of Yarrow to fight a duel in the morning, and gets killed. Wordsworth's narrator adorns his true love's forehead with heather that is in blossom, which indicates the fact that life has a much greater chance of continuity now that the times of the ballads are gone.

Reality seen in the light of common day, then, is good, and Wordsworth need not worry about the loss of his imaginative powers in old age. In fact, growing old is a



reason to celebrate: Wordsworth says that it would not be too strange if 'I enwreathed my own [forehead]' with heather because this is how the hills 'deck their own' in order 'to meet the wintry season,' or, in his case, old age (69-72). The river Yarrow, in comparison with human beings, seems oblivious to such a concern as it is ever-young and moves always forward without ever looking back. The realization that the poet has 'won [the Yarrow]' by establishing its real image in his mind in place of the old one, and the fact that he has now accepted the process of getting older, make him glad. Wordsworth now breathes 'gladsome notes [...]/Accordant to the measure,' (79-80) instead of asking someone else to play the harp for him as he did at the beginning of the poem. He realizes that he is getting older, and that life would probably be as quick to slip away from his grasp as the 'vapours' surrounding the hills would vanish without a warning. Despite this, he will 'banish' such a 'sad thought' and take consolation in the fact that the Yarrow's genuine image will always remain with him to sustain his heart in his moments of deep sorrow.

Like 'YU', this poem too ends with a reference to very old age. Wordsworth again invokes a time when he is old, feeble, or sad, and imagines himself calling on the river to give him courage and happiness (85-88). This preoccupation with change, old age, and death, is a common theme in the three Yarrow poems, but 'YV' is not simply a poem on coming to terms with change; it is a challenge to readers on more than one level. The poem sets out to be a weaker second part to a stronger first. What it actually seems to be saying is the exact opposite, however: reality does rival imagination, and the mental image of the place does not disappear as soon as the poet claims. It rather lingers on and gradually allows the actual everyday beauty of the place to take over. There is still another challenge the poem poses in its circumstance

of composition: had Wordsworth, or had he not, visited the Yarrow for the first time at the time of composition?

One of the simplest and most known truisms about Wordsworth and the Yarrow is that he never saw the river before 1814. 'YV' reveals how he was not impressed with the place he is looking at for the first time, 'And is this—Yarrow?—*This* the stream/Of which my fancy cherished,/So faithfully, a waking dream?' Wordsworth is almost incapable of believing that the view lying in front of him is the same one he has long nourished in his mind. But is this surprise justified? According to all the accounts mentioned above of the events leading to the composition of the first two Yarrow poems, it is. There is, nonetheless, one story which casts doubt upon the rest and, if proven true, renders the poet's disappointment questionable. The story arises out of two lines in 'YU' which read 'The Swan on still St. Mary's Lake/Float double, Swan and Shadow!' (43-44). Scott quoted these lines in a note to *Marmion*,<sup>39</sup> but seems to have forgotten the exact wording of the sentence, rendering it 'the swans on sweet St Mary's Lake/Float double, swan and shadow.' This error might have been the result of the use of 'Let' at the beginning of the stanza in 'YU', 'Let Beeves and home-bred Kine partake/ [...] [and let] The Swan [...] Float double.' Scott, who usually cites poetry from memory, must have forgotten this, turning the line into its nearest, most logical alternative: 'swans' remedies the lack of subject-verb agreement if the two lines are to stand on their own. Another possible reason for this misquote is that Wordsworth himself had written 'Swans' in the plural in the copy of 'YU' he sent Scott on 16 January 1805. The two lines read 'the Swan on still Saint Mary's Lake/Float double, Swans and Shadow.'<sup>40</sup> 'Swans' was clearly

<sup>39</sup> Scott: *Poetical Works, Marmion*, Note XXII, p.182. The erroneous 'swans' has been corrected in this edition.

<sup>40</sup> William Wordsworth to Walter Scott, 16 January 1805, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. I., p. 532.

changed into 'Swan' before the poem was published in 1807. Wordsworth apparently did not take lightly the fact that one of his lines had been altered, and wrote to Scott on 4 August 1808 asking 'that the erratum may be corrected in a future edition.'<sup>41</sup> Despite the fact that Scott obliged and corrected the mistake, the whole issue seems to have lingered on in Wordsworth's mind well into his late years, for it resurfaced during a conversation with one of his most devout disciples, the Irish poet and critic, Aubrey De Vere (1814-1902). The two men first met 'about eight years before [Wordsworth's] death', and it was not until 1875 that De Vere wrote his 'Recollections of Wordsworth',<sup>42</sup> a series of conversations he held with the poet which he later found worthy of collecting and publishing. It is in one of these conversations that the perplexing statement appears. Remembering Scott and his poetic qualities before moving on to the misquote, Wordsworth says,

Never could I have written 'swans' in the plural. The scene when I saw it, with its still and dim lake, under the dusky hills, was one of utter loneliness: there was *one* swan, and one only, stemming the water, and the pathetic loneliness of the region gave importance to the one companion of that swan, its own white image in the water. It was for that reason that I recorded the Swan and the Shadow. Had there been many swans and many shadows, they would have implied nothing as regards the character of the scene; and I should have said nothing about them.<sup>43</sup>

The sheer conviction with which Wordsworth describes the solitary swan, and the detailed explanation of the effect of its loneliness on the character of the scene, and how it would influence the readers/viewers make it hard to believe that the poet did not actually see any of this before writing the poem. Telling his friends that he had not

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<sup>41</sup> William Wordsworth to Walter Scott, 4 August 1808, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. II, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt, rev. by Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 264.

<sup>42</sup> *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Alexander B. Grosart, 3 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1876), Vol. III, pp. 486-99 (486, 494).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 487-88.

seen the swan when he indeed had seen it seems equally hard to believe. And since the only account of Wordsworth mentioning his seeing a swan on St. Mary's Lake is De Vere's 'Recollections,' this matter seems difficult to resolve, especially since De Vere spoke with Wordsworth when the latter was over seventy years old, and since De Vere only wrote the conversations down around thirty years after they took place. It does not seem far-fetched to assume that, because of old age, Wordsworth unconsciously described to De Vere a memory of seeing a swan and its shadow on Grasmere Lake – something which can be seen now – which the poet switched to the Yarrow.

### **Scottish Tour of 1831: 'Yarrow Revisited'**

'YR' is the Yarrow poem which is most directly concerned with Scott. This is not only because Wordsworth visited the place with Scott himself this time, but also because he realized, judging by the reports he had received about Scott's health and the sad change he personally saw in him when they met, that Scott may die soon.

On 23 August 1831 Wordsworth told Edward Quillinan 'I had the other day an affectionate message from Sir Walter Scott, adding that if I did not come soon to see him it might be too late. This was said in allusion to his delicate state of health.'<sup>44</sup> Scott had suffered 'a succession of slight apoplectic shocks attended with paralysis that [shows] itself principally in his utterance,' and it was thought that he had better spend the winter in Italy.<sup>45</sup> Wordsworth accepted his friend's invitation to visit him before his departure, as I have already mentioned in the first chapter. Wordsworth and Dora arrived at Abbotsford on 19 September, 1831, leaving on 22 September, one day

<sup>44</sup> William Wordsworth to Edward Quillinan, 23 August 1831, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. V, ed. by Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 421.

<sup>45</sup> William Wordsworth to Robert Jones, 26 September [1831], *Letters*, Vol. V, p. 436.

before Scott set out for Italy.<sup>46</sup> Their visit must have had the desired effect as ‘nothing could have gratified Sir Walter more, or sustained him better, if he needed any support from without,’ as Lockhart points out.<sup>47</sup> The two poets and some of the other visitors who were staying at Abbotsford at the time visited the Yarrow on 20 September. Wordsworth tells Isabella Fenwick how he felt on the day he and Scott went to visit the river together for the last time,

On our return in the afternoon we had to cross the Tweed directly opposite Abbotsford. The wheels of our carriage grated upon the pebbles in the bed of the stream that there flows somewhat rapidly- a rich but sad light of rather a purple than a golden hue was spread over the Eildon Hills at that moment and thinking it probable that it might be the last time Sir Walter would cross the stream I was not a little moved.<sup>48</sup>

‘YR’ was the outcome of this visit, and Wordsworth made sure that Scott read it before leaving for Italy.<sup>49</sup>

Wordsworth believed that ‘YR’ did not constitute a smooth and natural conclusion to the previous two Yarrow poems. He declared that it was almost impossible for him to ‘harmonise things that rest upon their poetic credibility, and are idealized by distance of time and space, with those that rest upon the evidence of the hour, and have about them the thorny points of actual life.’<sup>50</sup> It may be true that there was too great a pressure of fact, sadness, and uncertainty about the future for Wordsworth to produce something as almost exclusively centered on the self as most of his poetry, including both ‘YU’ and ‘YV’, but it is exactly this close association

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<sup>46</sup> Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown*, 2 vols (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970), Vol. II, pp. 1192-93.

<sup>47</sup> Lockhart, Vol. VII, p. 309.

<sup>48</sup> *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems 1820-1845*, ed. by Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, p. 525.

<sup>49</sup> Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000), p. 422.

<sup>50</sup> William Wordsworth to William Rowan Hamilton, 27 October [1831], *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. V, pp. 441-42.

with Scott's fears and hopes that makes the poem more humane, universal and engaging. Gill thought that Wordsworth was 'mistaken' to think the poem discordant with the rest of the Yarrow sequence, and Johnston considered it good enough to be 'the real rival to Yarrow Unvisited.'<sup>51</sup> I agree with these two readings, believing that there is more harmony among the three poems than Wordsworth was willing to admit.

'YR' was published in 1835 in a collection of poems entitled *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems*.

### Yarrow Revisited

The gallant Youth, who may have gained,  
Or seeks, a 'Winsome Marrow,'  
Was but an Infant in the lap  
When first I looked on Yarrow;  
Once more, by Newark's Castle-gate  
Long left without a Warder,  
I stood, looked, listened, and with Thee,  
Great Minstrel of the Border!

Grave thoughts ruled wide on that sweet day,  
Their dignity installing 10  
In gentle bosoms, while sere leaves  
Were on the bough, or falling;  
But breezes played, and sunshine gleamed—  
The forest to embolden;  
Reddened the fiery hues, and shot  
Transparence through the golden.

For busy thoughts the Stream flowed on  
In foamy agitation;  
And slept in many a crystal pool  
For quiet contemplation: 20  
No public and no private care  
The freeborn mind enthralling,  
We made a day of happy hours,  
Our happy days recalling.

Brisk Youth appeared, the Morn of youth,  
With freaks of graceful folly,—  
Life's temperate Noon, her sober Eve,  
Her Night not melancholy,  
Past, present, future, all appeared  
In harmony united 30  
Like guests that meet, and some from far,  
By cordial love invited.

And if, as Yarrow, through the woods  
And down the meadow ranging,  
Did meet us with unaltered face,

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<sup>51</sup> Gill, p. 371. Johnston, p. 576.

Though we were changed and changing;  
 If, *then*, some natural shadows spread  
 Our inward prospect over,  
 The soul's deep valley was not slow  
 Its brightness to recover. 40

Eternal blessings on the Muse,  
 And her divine employment!  
 The blameless Muse, who trains her Sons  
 For hope and calm enjoyment;  
 Albeit sickness lingering yet  
 Has o'er their pillow brooded;  
 And Care waylays their steps—a Sprite  
 Not easily eluded.

For thee, O SCOTT! compelled to change  
 Green Eildon-hill and Cheviot 50  
 For warm Vesuvio's vine-clad slopes;  
 And leave thy Tweed and Teviot  
 For mild Sorento's breezy waves;  
 May classic Fancy, linking  
 With native Fancy her fresh aid,  
 Preserve thy heart from sinking!

O! while they minister to thee,  
 Each vying with the other,  
 May Health return to mellow Age,  
 With Strength, her venturous brother; 60  
 And Tiber, and each brook and rill  
 Renowned in song and story,  
 With unimagined beauty shine,  
 Nor lose one ray of glory!

For Thou, upon a hundred streams,  
 By tales of love and sorrow,  
 Of faithful love, undaunted truth,  
 Hast shed the power of Yarrow;  
 And streams unknown, hills yet unseen, 70  
 Where'er thy path invite thee,  
 At parent Nature's grateful call,  
 With gladness must requite Thee.

A gracious welcome shall be thine,  
 Such looks of love and honour  
 As thy own Yarrow gave to me  
 When first I gazed upon her;  
 Beheld what I had feared to see,  
 Unwilling to surrender  
 Dreams treasured up from early days,  
 The holy and the tender. 80

And what, for this frail world, were all  
 That mortals do or suffer,  
 Did no responsive harp, no pen,  
 Memorial tribute offer?  
 Yea, what were mighty Nature's self?  
 Her features, could they win us,  
 Unhelped by the poetic voice  
 That hourly speaks within us?

Nor deem that localised Romance  
 Plays false with our affections; 90  
 Unsanctifies our tears—made sport  
 For fanciful dejections:  
 Ah, no! the visions of the past  
 Sustain the heart in feeling  
 Life as she is—our changeful Life,  
 With friends and kindred dealing.

Bear witness, Ye, whose thoughts that day  
 In Yarrow's groves were centered;  
 Who through the silent portal arch  
 Of mouldering Newark entered, 100  
 And clomb the winding stair that once  
 Too timidly was mounted  
 By the 'last Minstrel,' (not the last!)  
 Ere he his Tale recounted!

Flow on for ever, Yarrow Stream!  
 Fulfil thy pensive duty,  
 Well pleased that future Bards should chant  
 For simple hearts thy beauty,  
 To dream-light dear while yet unseen,  
 Dear to the common sunshine, 110  
 And dearer still, as now I feel,  
 To memory's shadowy moonshine!

This is a poem which exhibits a link between what has been, what is, and what will be. This sense of continuity is what harmonizes 'YR' with its predecessors.

Wishing that nature would warmly welcome Scott upon his arrival in Italy, Wordsworth eloquently brings together the most important landmarks in the history of their mutual friendship, namely the time he composed 'YU' and 'YV'. Wordsworth hopes that the stream would give Scott a worthy welcome and 'looks of love and honour' similar to those Wordsworth himself got from the Yarrow 'When first [he] gazed upon her'.

The end of the poem is yet another reminder of the two poets' mutual past as represented by the Yarrow sequence. Yarrow, Wordsworth says, is dear to 'dream-light', to 'the common sunshine', and 'dearer still [...] / To memory's shadowy moonshine!' These closing lines succinctly bring the three Yarrow poems together, and confirm the idea mentioned in 'YV' and 'Tintern Abbey' that recompense for lost youthful immediacy of experience is abundant in old age. Moonshine is dim and does



not allow us to see clearly. Things we see in it are less authentic than daylight because the moon derives her light from the sun. Similarly, memory is never free from the effects time and changes in feeling and perspective have on the accuracy of our recollections, which can therefore never be viewed objectively again. Things we see in the light of memory are thus perhaps dearer to us because of their familiarity and the fact that they have evolved and changed with our changing perception of life.

The sense of harmony between past and present is also to be found in the several direct mentions in 'YR' of Hamilton's ballad and Scott's *Lay*. These two poems are referred to by Wordsworth as 'localised Romance,' a term which could by extension also apply to 'YR' itself (89). 'Localised Romance,' Wordsworth tells us, does not incite our emotions just 'for sport.' Contrary to that, the visions we see in such poems 'sustain the heart in feeling/Life as she is' (94-95). In the first stanza of 'YR' Wordsworth shows us how time passes quickly, changing us dramatically. Hamilton's phrase 'winsome marrow' is again used here, but to a different effect. It does not indicate Wordsworth's beloved, but signifies the passage of time. The young people present with Wordsworth on the Yarrow trip that day have grown older and changed from what they had been during his first visit to the river. They are now old enough to have found – or to seek – love, 'The gallant Youth, who may have gained,/Or seeks, a 'Winsome Marrow,'/Was but an Infant in the lap/When first I looked on Yarrow' (1-4). The youth represent Wordsworth's own past, and will continue to go through the same stages of change he went through. In both 'YU' and 'YV' the poet refers to having a 'marrow' or a 'True-love'; in 'YR,' perhaps because his daughter accompanied him in the tour and some of Scott's young relatives and friends were also present, the poet does not mention any female companions and rather links himself with the older generation, writing as if an old man is looking back

on what poetry has meant to both himself and his friend. 'Tintern Abbey' also tells us how Wordsworth saw his old self in another, younger person, Dorothy, who was his extension into the past, and a continuation of himself beyond death,

In thy voice I catch  
The language of my former heart, and read  
My former pleasures in the shooting lights  
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while  
May I behold in thee what I was once,  
My dear, dear Sister!

(Lines 117-22)

Continuity in time, especially into the future, which occurs in 'YU', and 'YV,' both of which invoke old age, is not expressed by the poet in 'YR'. He sees the future in others, such as the bards who will sing Yarrow's praises to the coming generations (107), and in the Yarrow itself, which will flow on forever unobstructed. We do not see in this poem the conviction expressed in the previous Yarrow poems that the image of the river will cheer Wordsworth's mind up in moments of sorrow, or that expressed in 'Tintern Abbey', where he says that he stands 'on the banks of the Wye' 'with pleasing thoughts/That in this moment there is life and food/For future years' (63-66). This may be due to Wordsworth's unavoidably grave state of mind. When confronted with the prospect of the death of someone near, the mind tends to turn to thoughts of one's own mortality. Wordsworth could not escape the grim idea, especially since Scott was one year his junior, and since his own health was ailing too,

Yet I, whose lids from infant slumbers

Were earlier raised, remain to hear

A timid voice, that asks in whispers,

'Who next will drop and disappear?'<sup>52</sup>

Thus 'YR' marks an ending, not only of a sequence of poems which have spanned the lifetime of the two poets' friendship, but also of a great fellow poet's life and art.

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<sup>52</sup> 'Extempore Effusion Upon the Death of James Hogg', *William Wordsworth: Major Works*, p. 370-71 lines 25-28.

This overwhelming sense of imminent loss and tragedy requires a powerful means of overcoming sorrow and invoking strength. Wordsworth turns to poetry, asking for its help for one of its devout lovers: he summons ‘classic Fancy, linking/With native fancy her fresh aid’ to ‘preserve [Scott’s] heart from sinking!’ It is noteworthy that the Christian God is not called upon for help. Instead, the ‘Muse’ is invoked and ‘Eternal blessings’ are wished on her and her ‘divine employment’. The power of the muse has always trained ‘her Sons’ for ‘hope and calm enjoyment,’ even when they were much affected by sickness and both the physical and emotional effects of aging and inevitable decline.<sup>53</sup> This muse appears to be especially capable of helping poets who spread the power of nature in their writings. This seems to be as reassuring for Wordsworth, who declared confidently in ‘Tintern Abbey’ that ‘Nature never did betray/The heart that loved her’, as it is for Scott. He, Wordsworth assures him, will be ‘requite[d]’ with ‘gladness’ at ‘parent Nature’s grateful call’, for he has ‘shed the power of Yarrow’ on many other rivers through his poetry (65-72). Once a poet has perceived the wonders and beauties of nature, he or she has to convey them through poetry, for how could this message get across if poets did not put pen to paper, or if minstrels did not play their harps to teach others about the world around them! (81-88) But it is not only the poet’s duty to pass on the message, nature plays an equally important part in allowing writers to spread the word on. Wordsworth refers to a ‘pensive duty’ which the Yarrow has to ‘fulfil,’ thus allowing future poets to ‘chant/For simple hearts [its] beauty’ (105-110). This line carries hope in the future and the power of poetry, which is echoed in the following lines, where Wordsworth tries to draw a parallel between Scott and his old minstrel in *The Lay*. When he climbed the stairs of Newark tower for the first time, the aging bard was tired,

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<sup>53</sup> Jill Rubenstein, ‘Wordsworth and “Localised Romance”: the Scottish Poems of 1831’. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 16, 4, (1976), 581.

dejected, and desperate for food and shelter. When he emerged from the gates of the tower, however, his poetry had transformed him into a happy, reassured person with a permanent place to stay and a room for his creative energy to express itself.

Wordsworth hopes that the old minstrel ‘the “last Minstrel,” (not the last)’ and his creator will share the same destiny, and that the completely new world Scott is about to delve into will be as good to him as Newark had been to his bard, thus endowing him with hope, happiness and peace of mind (97-104).

The image of the river Yarrow in the poem is one of eternal youth and renewal. It witnesses change happening all around it, but is forever unchanged, unlike human beings. In the same way that the disappearance of the mist around the mountains in ‘YV’ saddened the poet for it signified the brevity of human life, Wordsworth was uneasy in ‘YR’ that the Yarrow greeted them ‘with unaltered face’ while they themselves were ‘changed and changing’ (35-36). The sorrow which befell his heart, however, was readily lifted, and his soul recovered its ‘brightness’ and drew strength from the river’s eternal youth and energy. This happened through some sort of association between the Yarrow and the ‘deep valley’ of Wordsworth’s soul (39-40).

The prevalent atmosphere of ‘YR’ is one of ending, of sadness, and finality; and, given the circumstances, it was unavoidable for Wordsworth that ‘YR’ should be a long wish for his dear friend – and ultimately, himself – to get better. The time the poem describes is autumn, which in itself brings to the mind melancholy associations of finality and ending. This is manifested in the ‘sere leaves/[which] Were on the bough, or falling’ (11-12). But there is still hope, for leaves have to fall in order to open the way for new growth, becoming part of the ever-rolling cycle of life, just like the infants who grow up to become young, or the power of memory which is capable

of linking past, present, and future: 'We made a day of happy hours/Our happy days recalling. [...] /Past, present, future, all appeared/In harmony united' (23-24, 29-30).

The Yarrow poems not only constitute a poetic sequence representative of the development of Wordsworth and Scott both as friends as well as individually, it also provides a rare example of the two poets' movement towards a shared common ground in so far as their poetic vision is concerned. Like the two revelations appearing in *The Excursion*, the Yarrow poems form a progression from a more individual to a more collective experience of nature.

In 'YU', the poet appears as someone who does not feel the need to visit the Yarrow, but upon analysis of the way he expresses this in the poem, it becomes clear that he is, in actuality, somewhat suspicious of the effect the outward forms of nature experienced at the river will have on him. This is indicated not only in the image of the apple of temptation that Wordsworth imagines growing at Yarrow, but also in the language he uses, which emphasize the outline of the imposing natural forms he might encounter at the river: 'What's Yarrow but a river bare/That glides the dark hills under?/There are a thousand such elsewhere/As worthy of your wonder [...] Fair hangs the apple frae the rock,/But we will leave it growing' (25-28, 35-36). In other words, Wordsworth will leave off the experience of the mere bare external forms of the Yarrow, which are like a thousand other such forms in Scotland, in favour of the spiritual experience of nature that is growing in his imagination. Here, then, the notions of nature and place oppose each other within Wordsworth's artistic endeavor in the first Yarrow poem. At the beginning of *The Prelude* Wordsworth fails to celebrate a sunset because he 'once again sees present good, like present joy, strangely opposed to the quickening of verse', and though 'fostered by nature, [he]

eventually outgrows its dependence.’<sup>54</sup> The poet does not want to visit the stream for a similar reason that he ‘fails to celebrate his sunset because poetry is not an act of consecration and nature not an immediate external object to be consecrated. When the external stimulus is too clearly present, the poet falls mute.’<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey Hartman likens this type of distrust of objective reality in favour of personalized imaginative recreation of nature to Blake’s objection to natural forms which he felt ‘always did and now do weaken, deaden and obliterate imagination in me.’<sup>56</sup>

‘YV’ is a good example of Wordsworth’s ability to meld into one personalized vivid vision both form and content – that is to say, he unifies the ballad form as well as the forms of nature he witnessed at Yarrow with the content of his own personalized imaginative reconfiguration of the event.<sup>57</sup> It appears that in this poem Wordsworth has intentionally attempted to integrate his strictly imaginative vision of the Yarrow in ‘YU’ within the sensuous element of nature he experienced in his first actual visit to the river. The poet says, ‘I see – but not by sight alone,/Loved Yarrow, have I won thee;/A ray of Fancy still survives --/Her sunshine plays upon thee’ (73-76). Wordsworth expresses here a type of double seeing: the sight of the forms of outward nature and the seeing of the imagination, which, through the love of the nature at Yarrow, has won in ‘YV’ a highly individualized rendition of Yarrow’s essence. The poet is attempting to break out of his imaginative solitude and plant the seed of his imaginative vision of Yarrow into the landscape and ballad tradition of the place, to fuse form and content within a close relationship between individualized imagination and the actual nature and place it artistically treats. In ‘YV’ it appears

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<sup>54</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, ‘A Poet’s Progress: Wordsworth and the *Via Naturaliter Negativa*’, in William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 600-601.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, p. 605.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>57</sup> Milnes, p. 25.

that Scott has perhaps had an influence tempting Wordsworth to experiment with his imaginative powers within a foreign natural environment and its cultural tradition. This has resulted in a poem that is ‘exceptionally susceptible in the sensuous side,’<sup>58</sup> where personal impressions are subordinated to the forms and expression of the Border cultural tradition. The Yarrow – one of several water images that occur in Wordsworth’s poetry as symbolic of the fusion of natural forms with imaginative creative powers -- indicates the subordination of his poetic inspiration to a foreign environment and the unaccustomed-to ballad form. In ‘YV’ Wordsworth especially employs this form, traditionally associated with communal-oriented expressions within the oral tradition, to break away from his tendency towards solitude and to create a poem of exceptional receptiveness to the impressions of the senses within a communal tradition: ‘Thy e’er-youthful waters keep/a course of lively pleasure;/And gladsome notes my lips can breathe,/Accordant to the measure’ (77-80).<sup>59</sup> Thus in ‘YV’ it appears that Scott may have influenced Wordsworth’s artistic development to infuse his unique imaginative ability within the love he held for the communal tradition of the Borders.

‘YR’ seems to represent the culmination of artistic discovery that is charted through all three Yarrow poems. Like *The Prelude*, ‘YR’ addresses the central question of ‘how to justify the human experience of pain and loss and suffering.’<sup>60</sup> Together, the Yarrow sequence of poems traces a development marked by three stages wherein the last stage represents ‘the mature mind [that] possesses powers, together with an added range, depth, and humanity, which are the products of the critical experiences it has undergone,’ in this case within ‘YU’ and ‘YV’.<sup>61</sup> If ‘YU’

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<sup>58</sup> Milnes, p. 25.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Abrams, 589.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

represents a suspended stage of artistic development that did not feel inclined to integrate its imaginative faculties with the actual natural forms of the Yarrow, and if 'YV' represents Wordsworth's experimental desire to fuse his imagination with the natural forms of a new environment, then 'YR' represents a complete fusion of form and content, language and idea, on a higher level than the previous two poems. As on Mount Snowdon in *The Prelude*, 'YR' reveals that the poet 'has acquired self-consciousness' of his experiment of merging form and content in the previous two poems in the sequence, and is now 'able to sustain the sense of its own identity as an individuation-in-unison with the objects it perceives.'<sup>62</sup> What is remarkable about 'YR' is that, more than just an experiment in fusing form and content, Wordsworth's imaginative powers have been completely localized within the natural world of the Yarrow and its ballad tradition and history, but now animated by the transcendent love Wordsworth feels for Scott. Within this poetic accomplishment, nature intimately speaks to the soul of Wordsworth in a similar manner to *Home at Grasmere* where 'the natural scene becomes alive, human, [...] and encloses the poet in an embrace of love

Embrace me then, ye Hills, and close me in ....

But I would call thee beautiful, for mild

And soft, and gay, and beautiful thou art,

Dear Valley, having in thy face a smile

Though peaceful, full of gladness.

(lines 110-17)<sup>63</sup>

In 'YR' we see a complete union of the mind and its relationship with nature, a paradisaical image of the mind's ability to recreate the world of ordinary experience

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid*, p. 594.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 596.



through the power of love for another in which one sees oneself. Wordsworth's encounter with the nature and place of Scott's Yarrow has allowed him to break away from his tendency toward solitude to be, like the Pensioner in *The Excursion*, reborn to a new communal vision of transcendent perfection towards which the inspiration of nature has led him.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 597.

## Conclusion

Nature tends to mean for Wordsworth what he feels is personally important about a certain place and its natural forms. There is in Scott's poetry about nature and place, however, a presence of a more socially and historically conscious mind. But these are by no means absolutes. Indeed, the poets' friendship influenced each other's development, and by learning from each other's tendencies they both enriched and achieved greater balance in their own art. Furthermore, it is especially through the interaction within the poets' friendship that we can better understand the fluid, dynamic, and evolving nature of both of their works which have been on many occasions not correctly understood by previous critics due to the lack of general consensus, especially in the case of Wordsworth, about what his artistic intention was, as well as the attempts of some readers to pigeonhole the art of the poets and what they stood for. Wordsworth, for example, has eluded any such categorization, and debates as old as the one concerning his definition as either a moral philosopher or a poet of nature have not been answered for almost a century.

By juxtaposing the two poets, it becomes evident that Scott tends to see nature in quite a different way from Wordsworth, observing her and her relevance to the more socially conscious events she supports within history and in the present. That is, Scott does not, as much as Wordsworth, personally intervene with nature, though he is capable of observing her with awe and expressing her powers in his poetry. Describing the influence of his childhood memories of Sandyknowe on his later poetry, Scott writes in the Introduction to Canto III of *Marmion*:

Yet was poetic impulse given,  
By the green hills and clear blue heaven.

It was a barren scene, and wild,  
 Where naked cliffs were rudely pil'd;  
 But ever and anon between  
 Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green.

(ll. 166-171)<sup>1</sup>

These lines are somewhat reminiscent of the way Wordsworth received his own poetic calling through nature as a schoolboy. In both instances nature is seen as an active force with her own will bent on administering to the two young men a poetic talent they were to enjoy throughout their lives. In both these men, this power mediates between the active forms of nature and the more receptive invisible imagination.

For Wordsworth, nature is a personalised guide causing him to reconfigure natural objects and realise that 'Nature itself led him beyond Nature'. Nature's 'locus is universal, not individual; she acts by expedients deeper than will or thought': 'Wordsworth cannot write poetry about nature as an immediate external object . . . [there] is a distinction to be made between the immediacy of Nature and the immediacy of a poem dealing with Nature.'<sup>2</sup> Scott writes poems dealing with nature as a force flowing through all creation; Wordsworth attempts to personally experience Nature, or, as Matthew Arnold puts it, to have nature guide the pen in his hand.<sup>3</sup> For example, Chapter Two of this thesis has attempted to demonstrate that *The Prelude* does not envision nature as an external object, but as a force that also operates within Wordsworth's imagination, guiding him to the ultimate realisation of his own all-encompassing divinity, which also binds him to nature.

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<sup>1</sup> *Marmion*, 'Introduction to Canto Third', *Scott: Poetical Works*, ed. by J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> The Norton *Prelude*, pp. 602-603.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 604.

In comparing Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Scott's *Memoirs* in Chapter Two, I have tried to showcase the two poets' different attitudes toward autobiographical writing, employing as the framework of my approach the role nature has played in their early lives. I have read *The Prelude* as one long, circular journey focused within the individual imagination, which Wordsworth takes under nature's tutelage, selectively picking those moments which contributed to his growth the most. This focus on the individual imagination in Wordsworth's writing at this stage of his artistic development evolves and branches out – partly due to his association with Scott, and the Yarrow poems dedicated to Scott – rooting itself within communal contexts like Grasmere Valley in *The Excursion*, and the Border region and tradition, where Wordsworth reached a greater maturity in his ability to fuse his unique imaginative powers with concrete affections for humanity in the world. Scott's *Memoirs* discussed in Chapter Two are deeply grounded in descriptions of natural forms occurring within locals that are part of a land steeped in history and tradition. Scott's *Memoirs* are less self-examining than *The Prelude*, and as his friendship with Wordsworth developed through the years, Scott appears to have attained a greater maturity as a poet in expressing his imaginative self-conscious reflection on the place and tradition he was so much part of and loved.

Wordsworth tends to adopt in his poetry a highly personal direct comprehension of nature somewhat apart from the objective reality of natural forms. His notion of nature is reborn within this privileged, highly individualised world of the imagination. Wordsworth's notion of nature is therefore a type of privileged autobiography of impressions of the natural world which one must traverse by knowing the mystical meaning of its signposted memories, but for which there is no objective set literary meaning or philosophical construction that everyone can agree

upon. Already in 1871, Richard Holt Hutton noticed this highly personalized imaginative quality in Wordsworth that is capable of transforming objective forms of nature into a totally new product, an imaginative essence of the forms it reflects: '[Wordsworth] does not discern and revivify the natural life which is in it; he creates a new thing altogether, namely the life of thought which it has the power to generate in his own brooding imagination.'<sup>4</sup> Hutton was able to distil and better understand the puzzling variety of Wordsworth's poetic genius that had confounded many previous critics. But he was unable to go a little further and express the difficulty of the suffering that Wordsworth experienced because of the nature of his artistic genius, and how he sought to connect the alienating aspects of such a uniquely imaginative genius that can distance itself from material reality and commune with the divine in solitude. This thesis has sought to better understand the process and challenges of artistic development that such a unique imaginative power engendered.

Hutton's observation on how Wordsworth could distance his mind from ordinary impressions arising from external reality is echoed over a century later by Hartman, whose analysis of the later development of Wordsworth stresses the importance of paying attention to the progress of the poet as he struggles with his unique personal vision of nature and simultaneously attempts to re-integrate into the community of men that may not fully understand it. This is evident in Chapter Four of this project, which has shown through the smooth movement in *The Excursion* from the individual revelation of the Solitary to the collective vision he was again part of, albeit within a larger group this time, how Wordsworth's view of nature and the role of his own poetic mission has evolved, drawing ever closer to the more socially conscious Scott-eian poetic realm.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Holt Hutton, *Literary Essays* (Harvey and Gravid: 1972), pp. 58-61.

My third chapter moves from the focus on the individual imagination in *The Prelude* to the deeply rooted community consciousness of the world of Scott's *Lay*. Set in a transitional period in the history of the Anglo-Scottish Borders in the sixteenth century, the 'Lay', or romance sung by the Minstrel, tells a love story and a supernatural story against the background of the warrior culture of the Borders. Border families were threatened by conflict both within their own community and by invading forces from England. Warfare of these sorts was not entirely without rules if the participants observed the codes of chivalry. The Last Minstrel, singing his lay towards the end of the seventeenth century, laments in his day the loss of the honourable chivalric behaviour once attributed to Borderers. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* is full of place-names: the names of rivers and mountains, of families and their lands, and the route of a beacon or a pilgrimage. In addition there are buildings: Newark Tower where the Minstrel sings; Branksome where his story is set; and Melrose Abbey, which has the dual function of Gothic Abbey in the supernatural theme, and Pre-Reformation place of worship at the end of the lay. Wordsworth never has occasion to bring forth such a list of place-names in the Lake District. Many of the place-names in *The Lay* are those of natural features, and the narrative shows them in wild and calm weather, austere and pleasantly spring-like, the latter being the setting for meetings between the lovers. Scott viewed nature with the eye of a painter, as already pointed out, and he wrote poetry as if he was painting on canvass. Having read Scott's *Lay*, for example, William Pitt stated, 'some of the effects were what [one would have] expected in painting, but had not thought capable of being given by poetry.'<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth differs from Scott in this respect, not looking at nature in terms of its artistic merits or suitability for drawing or painting. Scott believed that society

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<sup>5</sup> Ann M. Guest, 'Imagery of Colour and Light in Scott's Narrative Poems', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 12 (1972), 705–720 (p. 705).

had to learn from its history and to solve its own problems before it could stand up to problems coming from beyond the seas. This took on a particular significance in light of the impending French invasion threat which would have probably needed the coming together of the Scots and English to stem.

Chapter Four concentrates on two themes – the story of the Solitary, and the social changes in the Lake District attributed to the Industrial Revolution and associated capitalism. The story of the Solitary shows Wordsworth drawing on Nature and Place for the exploration of an individual's suffering and attempted healing. These experiences are mapped on to two Lake District valleys and their natural features: the Solitary's Valley in the Langdales and the Vale of Grasmere, the home of the Pastor. The other theme in this chapter has something in common with the previous chapter, on Scott's *Lay*, in that it deals with threats to society, but it adds also threats to nature.

My reading of *The Excursion* concentrates on Wordsworth's social vision reflected in the plot and characterization, with especial attention being given to the way nature is used to highlight the poet's intentions and explicate his themes. I also offer a reading of the influence of modernization on Michael and his small family, showing how their fixed way of life, which goes back for generations and is closely associated with nature, was threatened by the changes taking place around them, endangering not only this family's land, but their son's future and their northern identity.

Though the thesis has argued that *The Prelude* is a more individual view of nature, there is already in Book VI a definite shining forth of a need in Wordsworth to relate his individualised love of nature within his imagination to the real context of a love within a community. This need begins to be more fully realised in *The*

*Excursion*, which, through the transition between its two natural revelations, exemplifies the transition between *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*.

Chapter Five brings the two poets together in a discussion of the three poems by Wordsworth in which Scott's influence is most apparent: the Yarrow poems, which constitute an ample conclusion to this thesis because they are the summation of the friendship between the two writers. The two authors first met in 1803, the year the seed of 'YU' was planted in Wordsworth's mind. Their friendship came to an abrupt end in 1831, the year Wordsworth composed 'YR' as a tribute to his dying friend. The Yarrow poems exemplify in their movement from the more personal treatment of nature in 'YU' and 'YV', to the more socially based representation of Border tradition, a movement indicative of Wordsworth's willingness to both influence, and be influenced by, the rich tradition of the Border community.

Although Scott's poetic vision is usually grounded in this love within a community of tradition, he is also capable of treating nature from Wordsworth's often adopted position of solitude: for example, having already been a good friend of Wordsworth for a few years, it is reasonable to allow for the possibility that Scott's development as a poet was influenced by Wordsworth's love for solitude in nature. That is perhaps one of the reasons Scott describes in the Introduction to Canto II of *Marmion* 'lone Saint Mary's silent lake' and the possibility of living in such solitude.<sup>6</sup> On the whole, Scott tends to view nature as external, and as a bearer of history; however, there are instances when nature is seen to bond many more activities and run through all facets of life, which means that it is not limited to solitude only. Therefore, critics who view Scott and Wordsworth simply within the dichotomy of the former being more inclined towards tradition and history comprehended more

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<sup>6</sup> Robertson, pp. 102-103.



objectively and outwardly, and the latter being inclined towards more solitary existential impressions felt inwardly are correct, although the issue is slightly more complicated than that. The thesis has attempted to investigate this issue through the dynamic interaction of the two poets and their poetic development in a more nuanced manner. As has already been demonstrated, nature carries both meanings for Scott: a place for contemplation and reverence, and an object to be used, such as the way he thought that Melrose Abbey could be visited at night, when it would resemble a painting, or his remark that nature was more suited as an object for a painter rather than a writer. Scott's capacity for both approaches played a role in the way his friendship with Wordsworth influenced his poetry, though he may not have always agreed with his friend's views on poetry.

Scott brings out the explicit distinction between nature and human life in the opening stanzas of Canto IV of his *Lay*. The Minstrel draws a contrast between the more eternal time-consciousness of the river Teviot in the past, when its shores bore 'glaring bale-fires' and 'steel-clad warriors', and the present when 'all is peaceful, all is still'. This is, however, 'Unlike the tide of human time' which remembers griefs of the past – one of which turns out to be the death of the Minstrel's son. This instance finishes as personal, but it is, nevertheless, still within the field of human time, and approaches eternal nature in a rather objective manner, one which is time-bound in the history of the rise and fall of nations and the cyclical ebb and flow of nature. Here, Scott portrays a fallen reality of violent and self-interested actions in the external world, seeking redemption through a communal love and idealised chivalrous behaviour that can restore a sense of wholeness between subject and object, form and content, word and idea.

The Introduction to Canto I of *Marmion* is written in November and gives a detailed account of nature in the Autumn with only the promise of the return of spring. The poet continues:

To mute and to material things  
 New life revolving summer brings;  
 The genial call dead Nature hears,  
 And in her glory reappears.  
 But oh! my country's wintry state  
 What second spring shall renovate?  
 What powerful call shall bid arise  
 The buried warlike and the wise;  
 The mind that thought for Britain's weal,  
 The hand that grasped the victor steel?<sup>7</sup>

The above is a reference to the Napoleonic Wars, lamenting the recent death of people whom the poem goes on to name: Nelson and the political leaders Pitt and Fox. This links nature to national affairs, not those confined to the Borders. So although nature to Scott represents tradition, and can incorporate the personal solitary experience, it is also national and bonds all human experience.

Scott's poetry on nature and place represents a worldly context of human affairs throughout which the power of nature flows through the national, the communal, and the solitary. Unlike Scott's more frequent tendency to portray human society with all its violence and other sins and flaws, emerging out of the time-bound cyclical power of nature, the image of Wordsworth's highest comprehension of nature is an individual journey of the pure heart journeying vertically up Mount Snowdon in *The Prelude* and revealing a perfect and eternal understanding of nature. In this

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<sup>7</sup> Robertson, pp. 89-90.

privileged, pure state distanced from the cyclical fallen state of history, Wordsworth can be seen as a type of 'second Adam—more fortunate, indeed, than his predecessor,' who, like Scott, defines himself as part of the world of history and tradition. Indeed, Scott was happy to be seen as a minstrel, whereas Wordsworth named Coleridge and himself as 'Prophets of Nature' (*Prelude*, XIII, 442). Therefore, Scott's poetic development tends to speak with the voice of transitory beings and human society striving within history towards heroic ideals. This socially responsible vision which Scott used to empower society with, improving human life and preparing it for the future, found its expression in his poetry in a manner that was different from Wordsworth's less socially imbued vision. In contrast, Wordsworth's poetic development learns to speak with the 'acknowledged voice of life' of transitory beings who have restored 'Paradise, and groves Elysian [. . .]/A simple produce of the common day' (*Home at Grasmere*, ll. 800-808). Given the dichotomy of minstrel/prophet that defines the two poets, the possibility must be allowed that, as Wordsworth descended from his imaginative peak of Mount Snowdon like the Biblical Moses descending from Mount Sinai, he may have perhaps unconsciously seen in his friendship with Scott and the people and tradition of the Borders a flock for him to guide.<sup>8</sup> This may be evident in Wordsworth's use of the ballad form in the Yarrow sequence in order to fuse his imagination of divine power, which has been fully revealed to him on Snowdon, with the region and tradition of the Borders. However, Wordsworth's use of the ballad form, traditionally associated with the communal-oriented oral tradition, in the three Yarrow poems could also be read as an attempt on the poet's part to seek rootedness in another person's tradition and strong loving local bonds. Wordsworth's premature loss of his mother, followed by his

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<sup>8</sup> Abrams, p. 593.

separation from his father and part of his family, as well as his home, may have created in him a chronic sense of uprootedness, which was all the more enhanced by the death of his father later. This perhaps led him to seek such rootedness in people he knew and places he lived. Scott's strong bond with his own country, as well as his unmatched local affinities with Borderers – which is one of the things Dorothy remarked about after first meeting Scott – may have driven Wordsworth to try and vicariously experience this rootedness through another.

The friendship between Scott and Wordsworth, then, has proven to be a useful lens in viewing their artistic development; the interaction of this friendship also greatly affects this development in several nuanced ways. The evolution of the poets' writing is, to some degree, mirrored in their friendship and the opportunities for artistic exchange that this friendship afforded.

It might be asked what are the achievements of this thesis. In a critical world which seldom links Wordsworth and Scott the thesis contrasts the writers as autobiographers and as poets writing about Nature and Place in their own geographical areas. In Scott's case such enquiries have not previously been made. That is hardly the case with Wordsworth about whom there has been so much critical writing. Two points might, however, be ventured. The examination of Nature and Place with regards to the story of the Solitary in *The Excursion* stands out in a context in which critical writing has concentrated on the philosophical debates in the poem. Likewise the fact that the study of Wordsworth's Yarrow Poems in this thesis investigates their ballad context and the role of Scott within them stands out in a context in which most critics concentrate on the theme of imagination in the poems.

This thesis has demonstrated that an investigation of the chosen texts reveals how the interaction between Wordsworth and Scott, both as men and poets, was key

in the development of some of their ideas and poetic practices, especially in so far as their understanding of nature within a particular locale evolved. Furthermore, the interaction between the two men allows for an empirical test through which it is possible to understand the dynamic power of their work both within human relations and as affecting, and affected by, different communities and places. What this test reveals is that the poetry of the two authors is, despite the common ground they share, significantly different, while simultaneously complementary in remarkable ways. It could perhaps even be argued that the poetry of one writer needs that of the other in order to be fully understood. This makes the relationship of the two writers' poetry not an opposition but a polarity, complementing each other and actually being part of one energy field. In fact, friendship does form a charge of unity through the affections. This dynamic polarity tells us much about how these works use language to affect the reader's psyche. If Wordsworth is the 'second Adam,' then his emergence is dependent upon the first Adam, which, in his grounding within the world and interest in historical themes of warfare and strife, Scott in some ways resembles. The minstrel Scott and his association with the heroic age and the epic tradition of the ballad in many ways harkens back to the epic tradition of the ancients; and Wordsworth can be seen as the tragic figure with the all-encompassing tragic vision of life detached from the comedy of the world. In many ways, Wordsworth and Scott fit together as a type of Apollonian and Dionysian artistic polarity. It seems likely that Scott's focus on social tradition helped Wordsworth to find a more communal-loving voice which culminates in poems such as 'Michael'; and Wordsworth's transcendent imaginative vision has perhaps lent to Scott's poetry a charge of unique imaginative power that transformed aspects of his traditional poetry into equally communal-loving, self-conscious reflections upon that tradition. In this

regard, there runs a deep current of love for humanity that nourishes the two men's friendship as well as their poetry, a type of Yarrow, if you will, that fuses the divinity within us with the most human element.

Amongst the lack of consensus about what Wordsworth's poetry stood for, the shifting debate as to what his classification as a poet is, and the dearth of scholarship comparing him with Scott in an attempt to understand Scott's own position as a poet more fully, such an understanding is highly called for.

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